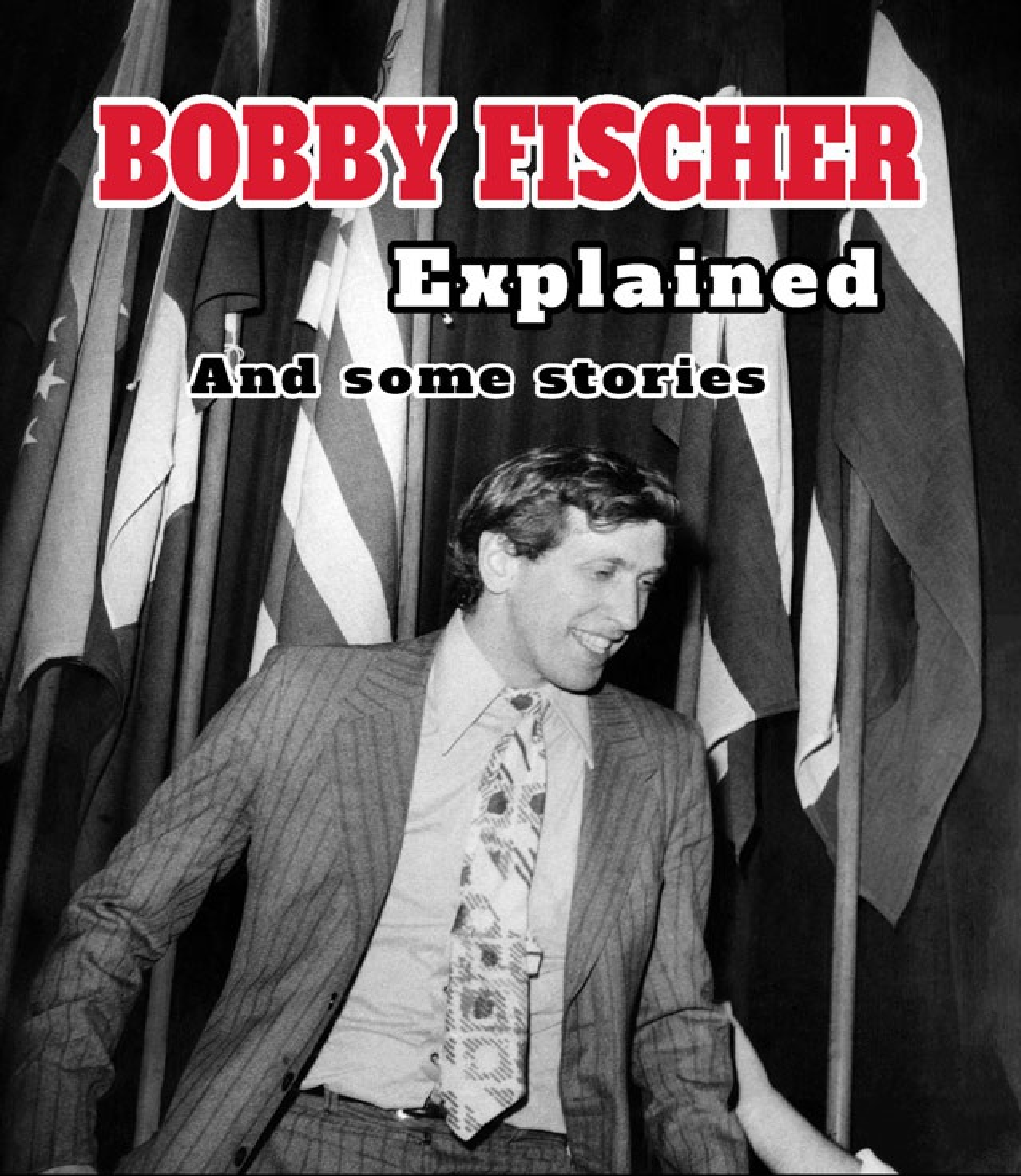
BOBBY FISCHER

Explained

And some stories



Zenón Franco

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Zenón Franco

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BOBBY FISCHER
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E- mail: zenonchessediciones@gmail.com
www.zenonchessediciones.com
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Introduction

It is very satisfying to continue this new venture with a book about Robert James Fischer, published by *Zenonchess Ediciones*.

Robert (“Bobby”) Fischer was the great revolutionary in the history of chess in the twentieth century. Thanks to his dazzling career and his demands for better conditions for players, chess was popularised and was converted into a professional activity with many offshoots. His practically single-handed struggle to overthrow Soviet domination of the world of chess is an achievement difficult to match.

A few years ago I rejected the idea of writing a book about Fischer’s games, because I felt that so much had already been written about him that it would be difficult for me to bring anything new to it. But I changed my mind; I think that a new study using the “Move-by-Move” format, is appropriate for commenting on his games and is useful for both learning and teaching.

As usual, exercises are set and also questions are asked from the reader’s point of view. This system of training and education is similar to the one I have used so many times already, the system of “guessing the moves.” Here there are no points awarded for guessing moves, but instead there are more explanations, giving the reader the opportunity to ask questions.

Of course, to many fairly experienced chessplayers, some of Fischer’s games will already be well-known, or at least familiar. That is not an obstacle to benefitting from this book, because for the most part these games will not have been analysed in depth or recalled very clearly, so that taking a fresh look at them, pausing at key moments, can be instructive.

Also, as usual, I have tried to include the contributions of the players themselves or of distinguished commentators. Old analyses sometimes contain errors that the ever-stronger and stronger analysis engines detect, but those earlier explanations are still to be valued.

Also, as usual, I try to include the practical viewpoint, since we do not play against computers of unattainable calculating ability, but against human beings who, like ourselves, make mistakes, like or dislike their positions (which at times does not depend on objective evaluation), get tired, etc.

I am glad to discover that Magnus Carlsen also gives great importance to the practical element in his choice of variations. For him it is important for the position to be “easy to play,” not for a computer but for a human.

This book is about Fischer’s games; it is not a biography, but I wanted to include some lesser-known anecdotes from his tournaments in Argentina.

I am grateful to Daniel Green, Carlos Bielicki and the late Carlos Incutto for their stories about Fischer which I relate in this book, to newspaper La GACETA from Tucumán, for the two photos and to Agustín Berrueta for the poem which ends this homage/appreciation of our eleventh World Champion.

Thanks also to John Donaldson.

I hope that you will enjoy this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. I also hope that it will be of benefit to you for learning a little more about our game of chess, through the medium of Fischer's games.

Finally, it is my hope that it will also provide useful teaching material to those involved in chess education.

Ponteareas, November 2021

Dedicated to Yudania

The structure of the book

The book begins with a brief description of Fisher's playing style.

The central section is made up of sixty annotated games. The most well-known ones are examined only after a critical stage has been reached. There are also ten game extracts covering all his career.

After game 60, to say farewell to him, a poem by Leonese journalist Agustín Berrueta follows, it was written soon after Bobby Fischer's demise.

The book ends with a summary of Fischer's more outstanding performances.

Playing style

There are many testimonies to Fischer’s play, but little can be added to the description given by Vladimir Kramnik in an interview for the Russian website e3e5.com in 2005. Let’s look at some of his most interesting remarks.

On Fischer’s playing strength:

“There was a moment when he had everything at once: energy, force, preparation, playing strength... As though all the rays converged in one point! He just had no weaknesses - how to play against such a man?! All great chess players have that period when they are on top of every aspect of their game; I think that Fischer peaked during that Candidates cycle and the Spassky match.”

On how Fischer handles the opening:

“Fischer is the inventor of modern opening preparation. Unlike Botvinnik, who merely understood the importance of preparation in general, Fischer brought it up to the modern level: he posed problems to the opponent on every move, with both colours, in any opening. Fischer immediately put pressure on anyone from the very first move! This ‘high-pressure chess’ was later modernized by Kasparov, who is Fischer’s direct follower in a way.”

On the energy that Fischer deployed over the chessboard:

“Fischer was the first player who created tension from the first move to the last, without giving the opponent any pause for breath. Whether in a positional or in a tactical game, he always posed as many problems to the opponent as possible. He played very ‘energetic’ chess.”

On Fischer’s style:

“The more chess has developed and the stronger the players have become, the less distinctive their style looks, and there are fewer players now with a clear personal style. Everything is moving towards universality. I can’t say that Fischer had any kind of style - he was an all-rounder. You can say that his is a cumulative style. In his prime, Fischer had Smyslov’s clarity, Spassky’s versatility, Alekhine’s energy... His only relative weakness - he played very rationally and he wasn’t particularly strong in unclear, irrational positions. Spassky was stronger than him there. Fischer preferred clear game plans.”

On Fischer's only weakness, irrational positions:

"...such positions were just too hard for Fischer to handle. Of course, these are nuances, efforts to find the slightest weakness and they show that he's still human. Fischer admitted this weakness himself. Most often, he tried to avoid such positions altogether. His strength is the crystal clarity of his ideas. Fischer was a great Ruy Lopez player, a brilliant one. This is an opening where it's very hard to create chaos on the board."

The description is so complete and so lucid that I will only add Yasser Seirawan's opinion given in his book *No Regrets*, about the 1992 Fischer - Spassky match.

Seirawan is of the opinion that chessplayers can be divided into 1) tacticians, 2) positional players, 3) strategists, who have both tactical and positional skill, and 4) the highest level, the builders, who can play all kinds of positions and who "disarm the opposition by making the simplest of moves that build upon one another. Unable to discern a direct threat the opponent drifts. Eventually a storm occurs and the builder wins from his superior position, or along the way the patient builder discovers a flaw in the opponent's camp." According to Seirawan the best exponent of this style was "of course, Karpov. Kasparov, too, is a builder in a tactical sense. Fischer had a deserved reputation as a theoretician and tactician. In fact he was so brilliant in these two aspects that many don't appreciate that he, too, is a master builder."

I am going to refer to something from way back when I was a teenager, which is related to what Seirawan says. I complained to my teacher Bernardo Wexler that Fischer "never sacrificed," comparing him to Tal, the other great role model of my adolescence.

I couldn't see that they were different styles; Fischer's style looks simple, easy to understand, but most of the time only in retrospect - not before.

As Botvinnik said, the tactical depth of Fischer's play was not inferior to Tal's; in appearance his moves seemed much less threatening but were just as lethal as those of "the Magician from Riga."

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BOBBY FISCHER

Robert James Fischer was born on the 9th of March 1943 in Chicago, USA. He learnt to play chess at the age of six. In 1950 his family moved to New York, and his talent was soon recognised by some organisers who encouraged him. At the age of 12, in 1955, he joined Manhattan Chess Club.

1956

In the prologue to the book *Bobby Fischer. The Career and Complete Games of the American World Chess Champion* Larry Evans recounts that he got to know Fischer when the latter was 13, in September 1956. Evans had won the Canadian Open, in Montreal, and when it was over Fischer asked him for a lift in his car back to the United States. During the 400-mile journey Fischer hardly spoke to Evans' wife, but throughout the whole journey, while Evans was driving, he asked him questions about complicated lines, without sight of a chess board, of course.

"He was mostly interested in the Sicilian Defense, which became his workhorse against 1.e4. As I dropped him off at a subway stop to Brooklyn, he said, "My mind is working on chess all the time even when I'm not playing or studying."

Not long before this, in July, Fischer had had his first important success; he was declared the United States (under-20) Junior Champion, with 8½ points out of 10. this was his second try; the previous year, in Lincoln, he had managed only a 50% score.

Fischer's first big closed tournament was the Rosenwald Trophy, in New York, from the 7th to the 24th of October 1956. The overall winner was the United States number one, Samuel Reshevsky, with 9 points, followed by Arthur Bisguier, 7, etc. Fischer's debut was hardly spectacular, with a score of only 4½ points out of 11 (+2 =5 –4) and sharing 8th to 10th place, but let's not forget that he was only thirteen years old. And nothing was ever the same again after the first game of our book.

Game 1

"The Game of the Century"

Fischer played one of the most beautiful games in the history of chess, given the title "the game of the century" by Hans Kmoch when it was published in the December 1956 edition of *Chess Review*. "If Fischer had been quite unknown before, this game would change the picture forever," wrote Karsten Müller.

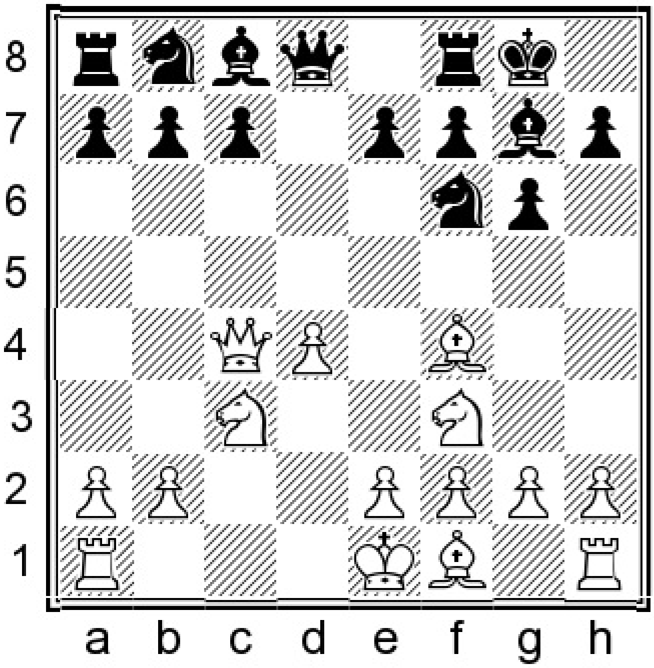
This game was the first to be published with annotations by Bobby Fischer, in collaboration with his mentor John Collins. It later appeared with the same notes in *Bobby Fischer's Games of Chess*. It is our Game 1, but it is notable that Fischer did not include this work of art in his book *My 60 Memorable Games*.

Donald Byrne
Robert Fischer
Grünfeld Defence [D97]
3rd Rosenwald, New York (8), 17.10.1956

1.♘f3 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.d4 0-0 5.♗f4 d5

The Grünfeld Defence and the King's Indian were Fischer's main weapons against 1.d4 from childhood.

6.♕b3 dxc4 7.♕xc4



7...c6

"Rather sluggish for such an opening," commented Kasparov, which is curious, as he once reached this position himself with Black, by transposition of moves.

More active is 7...♘a6 followed by 8...c5, as Kasparov himself also played, but more than forty years later.

8.e4 ♘bd7?!

Question: Why is this developing move dubious?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Because it is passive and fails to equalise. Here Kasparov was justified in playing the more energetic 8...b5 against Miles in their match in Geneva 1986, and after 9.♕b3 ♕a5 (threatening ...b4) 10.♗d3 ♗e6 11.♕d1 he played 11...♖d8 and stood worse, although he still won; 11...c5 and 11...♗g4 are better moves.

Fischer commented simply: “Another system, popularized at Saltsjobaden, is 8...b5 9.♕b3 ♕a5.”

9.♖d1

“If 9.e5 ♘d5! 10.♘xd5 cxd5 11.♕xd5 ♘xe5!” (Fischer).

9...♘b6 10.♕c5 ♗g4 11.♗g5?

11.♗e2 was preferable, e.g. 11...♘fd7 12.♕a3 ♗xf3 13.♗xf3 e5 14.dxe5 ♕e8 15.♗e2 ♘xe5 and here 16.♕b3 grants White a slight advantage.

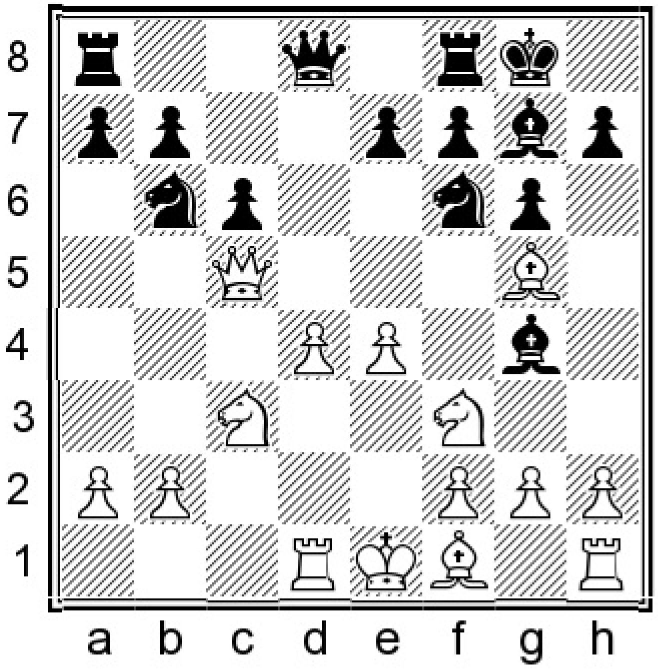
White wants to hinder the planned 11...♘fd7, but this is “a fatal error” as Kasparov indicated.

Question: Is it really so bad? I understand that moving a piece twice in the opening isn’t advisable, but White can generally get away with this.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Of course, Donald Byrne was aware of this but lost his sense of danger.

Admittedly it was very difficult to imagine that this was such a serious mistake and to prove this required a unique dose of imagination.



Exercise: Fischer commented: “The object of this move is to apply pressure on the e-pawn. However, it neglects development and White immediately finds himself in serious trouble,” How did the young Fischer reply to this move?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

11...♘a4!!

This move is one of the very best proofs that chess is an art form.

In my opinion it ranks with, among others, (to the lines)18...♖a3!! of Pillsbury - Lasker, St Petersburg 1896, 18.♖xf7!! of Botvinnik - Portisch, Monte Carlo 1968, or the sequence begun with 24.♖xd4!! of Kasparov - Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 1999.

I shall never forget the expression of astonishment on the face of a young pupil when I showed her this position, probably the same expression I must have had many years before.

Emotion aside, the explanation is simple: Black is taking advantage of the weakness of the e4-pawn and of the white king still being in the centre. But demonstrating this as Fischer did is a different matter.

In Bobby Fischer’s Games of Chess Fischer awarded this move only one of the two exclamation marks that appeared in the Chess Review article. His comment was: “With this strong and surprising move, Black quickly exploits the lag in White’s development and the position of the queen.”

12.♕a3

12.♘xa4 would naturally be answered with 12...♘xe4, when 13.♕c1 loses to 13...♗xf3 14.gxf3 ♕a5+ 15.♘c3 ♘xg5, while after 13.♕xe7, as well as 13...♕a5+, 13...♕xe7 14.♗e7 ♖fe8 wins.

After 12.♕b4 ♘xc3 13.bxc3 ♘xe4 14.♗xe7, the opening of the e-file is decisive, e.g. 14...♕e8 15.♗e2 ♘xc3 or 15.♖d3 c5! 16.♕xb7 ♘d6 17.♕c7 ♘f5, and wins.

12...♘xc3 13.bxc3

Exercise: With the move in the game, 12.♕a3, White maintained the pressure on e7, seeking to immobilise the f6-knight. How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13...♘xe4!

"Black sacrifices the exchange for a pawn and a strong attack," wrote Fischer, who left this move without an exclamation mark.

14.♗xe7 ♕b6!

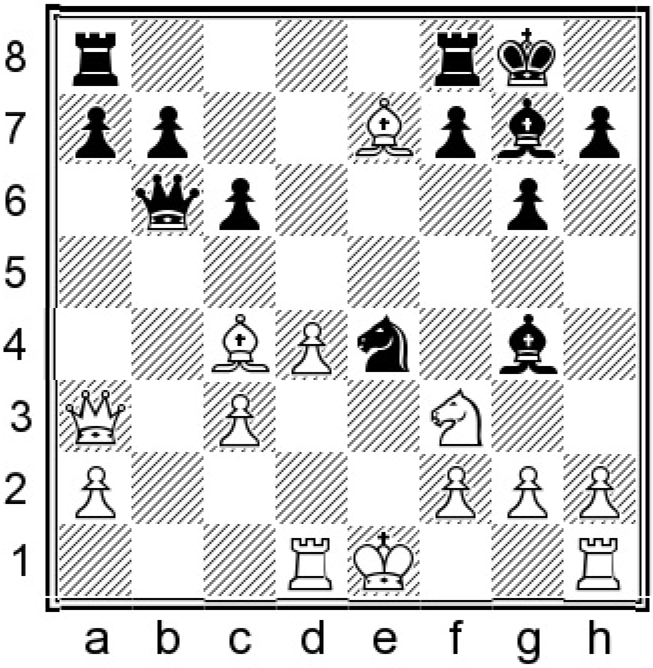
"White overlooked this move." (Fischer).

14...♕e8?! was bad due to 15.♖d3!, defending against 15...♘xc3 and enabling White to cover the e-file with ♖e3.

15.♗c4

With the black queen on b6 rather than e8, 15.♖d3 fails to 15...♖fe8, among other things, and the black queen can go to b1.

If White wins the exchange with 15.♗xf8 ♗xf8 16.♕b3 then 16...♘xc3! 17.♕xb6 (or 17.♖d3 ♘d5, threatening 18...♖e8+, 18...♕a5+, 18...♗b4+, etc.) 17...axb6 18.♖a1 and now for instance, 18...♗a3-b2 is strong, although there are other attractive options.



Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

15...♘xc3!

With another spectacular blow; in contrast, 15...♖fe8? would give White a breathing space, allowing him to play 16.0-0, finally bringing his king to safety.

It is worth noting how Fischer plays flexibly, not yet exchanging on f3, seriously weakening White's structure, although this was also good. But Fischer's move is better and leads to a more brilliant finish.

16.♗c5

Here 16.♕xc3 allows 16...♖fe8 (16...♖ae8 also works, as although care is needed, there is no real need to keep f7 defended), not fearing 17.♗xf7+ ♔xf7 18.♘g5+ ♔xe7 and White has nothing.

17.♕e3 is answered with 17...♗xf3 18.gxf3 ♕c7, regaining the piece with a winning position.

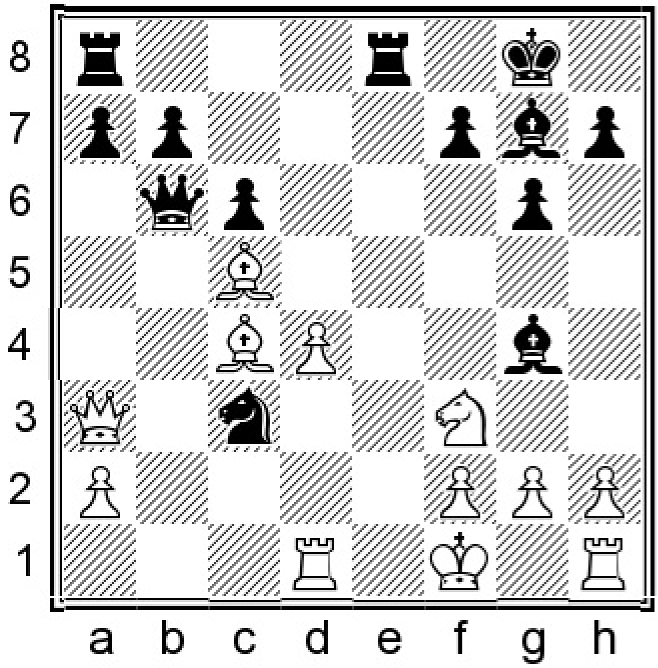
Exercise: Why can't Black answer 17.♕e3 with the immediate 17...♕c7?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Because allows 18.♗xf7+!, and wins the exchange without compensation, since 18...♔xf7 loses to 19.♘g5+ ♔g8 20.♕b3+, followed by the smothered mate known as “Philidor’s Legacy.”

16...♖fe8+ 17.♔f1

Forced; if 17.♔d2 ♘e4+, or 17.♘e5 ♗xe5 18.♗xb6 ♗d6+, and wins in both cases.



Exercise: Which move now is one of the keys to the combination?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17...♗e6!!

“A startling queen sacrifice which wins by force!”. (Fischer).

This move explains why Fischer did not exchange on f3. This unexpected and elegant retreat is one of the keys to the combination, which “makes the game especially pretty,” commented Kasparov.

Yuri Averbakh noted that “it is well known that in a tactical struggle Fischer usually aims to refute his opponent’s ideas with intermediate moves.”

Of course, at the time when this game was played it was still not possible to reach such a conclusion about Fischer’s style, but this is the start.

There is speculation that Byrne was still confident in his position and was expecting the logical retreat 17...♘b5?

Exercise: What would have happened then?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The continuation would have been our familiar blow 18.♗xf7+! ♔h8 19.♗xb6 ♘xa3 20.♗c5, with advantage to White; even worse would be 18...♔xf7 19.♕b3+ ♗e6 20.♘g5+ ♔g8 (or 20...♔f6 21.♘xe6 ♖xe6 22.♕f3+ and mate) 21.♘xe6 ♘xd4 22.♘xd4+ ♕xb3 23.♘xb3, as indicated by Fischer.

18.♗xb6

In the event of 18.♗xe6? it is Black who strikes with Philidor’s Legacy: 18...♕b5+ 19.♔g1 ♘e2+ 20.♔f1 ♘g3+ 21.♔g1 ♕f1+!.

After 18.♕xc3 ♕xc5! 19.dxc5 ♗xc3 20.♗xe6 ♖xe6 Black has a technically winning ending with an extra pawn.

If 18.♗e2 (or 18.♗d3) then 18...♘b5! 19.♕b4 ♕c7 20.♗xb5 cxb5 21.d5 ♖ed8 22.d6 ♕c6 and the white position collapses.

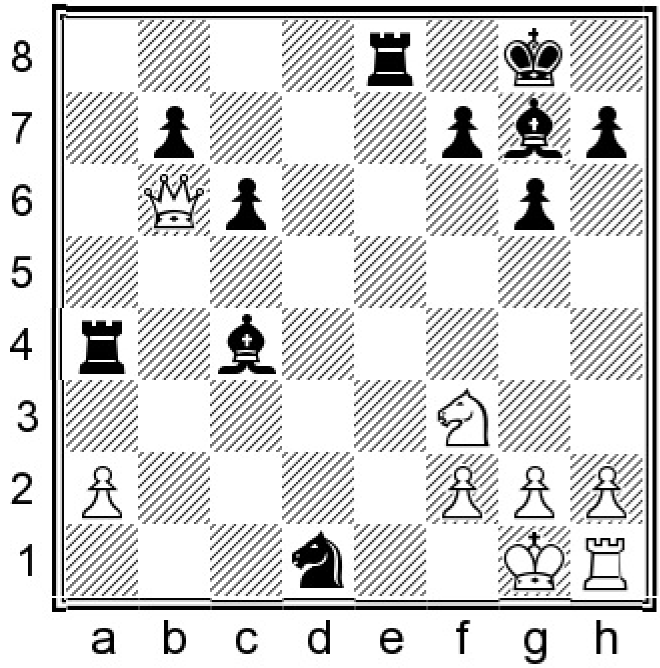
18...♗xc4+ 19.♔g1 ♘e2+ 20.♔f1 ♘xd4+ 21.♔g1

21.♖d3 axb6 22.♕c3 ♘xf3 also loses. There now follows a forced sequence, after which it all becomes clear.

21...♘e2+ 22.♔f1 ♘c3+ 23.♔g1 axb6 24.♕b4

24.♕d6 is no better; among other things, Black can win with 24...♘xd1 25.♕xd1 ♖xa2, followed by 26...♖a1.

24...♖a4 25.♕xb6 ♘xd1



After the smoke has cleared, Black is left with a rook and two pieces for the queen, a winning material advantage; furthermore, the white pieces lack coordination.

26.h3

If 26.♕xb7 then the most accurate response is to interpolate 26...♗d5 and capture on a2 later; then if 27.♕d7 ♖e2 leaves White defenceless.

26...♖xa2 27.♔h2 ♘xf2 28.♖e1 ♖xe1 29.♕d8+ ♗f8 30.♘xe1 ♗d5 31.♘f3 ♘e4 32.♕b8 b5

This advance is the quickest way to win; the unstoppable pawn is combined with a mating attack by Black's four well-coordinated pieces. The engines indicate that with best play it is mate in 16 moves!

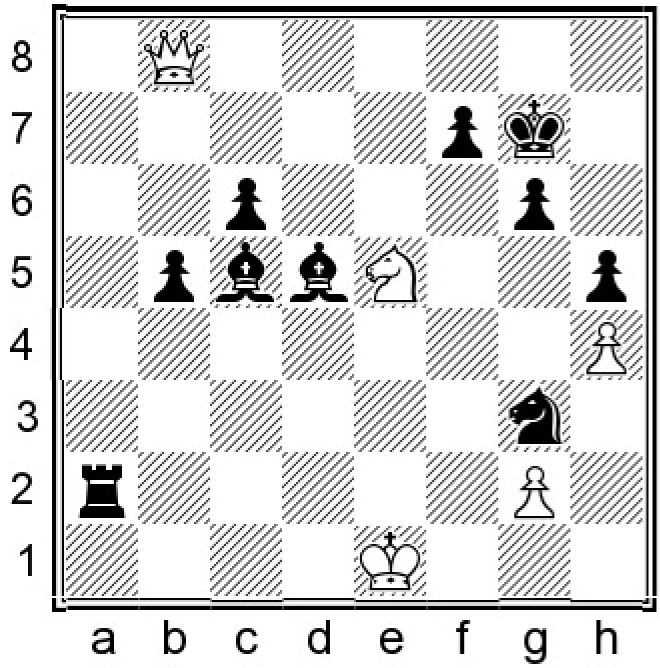
33.h4 h5 34.♘e5 ♔g7

"Threatening 35...♗d6 36.♕e8 ♗e6 and the win of the knight." (Fischer).

35.♔g1 ♗c5+ 36.♔f1

36.♔h1 allows a quicker finish: 36...♘g3+ 37.♔h2 ♘f1+ 38.♔h3 ♗xg2++, while if 36.♔h2 then 36...♘d2, with the idea of 37...♘f1+ followed by mate.

36...♘g3+ 37.♔e1



37...♗b4+

Now there is forced mate in five moves; the pernickety engines point out that there is a mate in four with 37...♖e2+ or 37...♗b3.

38.♔d1 ♗b3+ 39.♔c1 ♘e2+ 40.♔b1 ♘c3+ 41.♔c1 ♖c2++

0–1

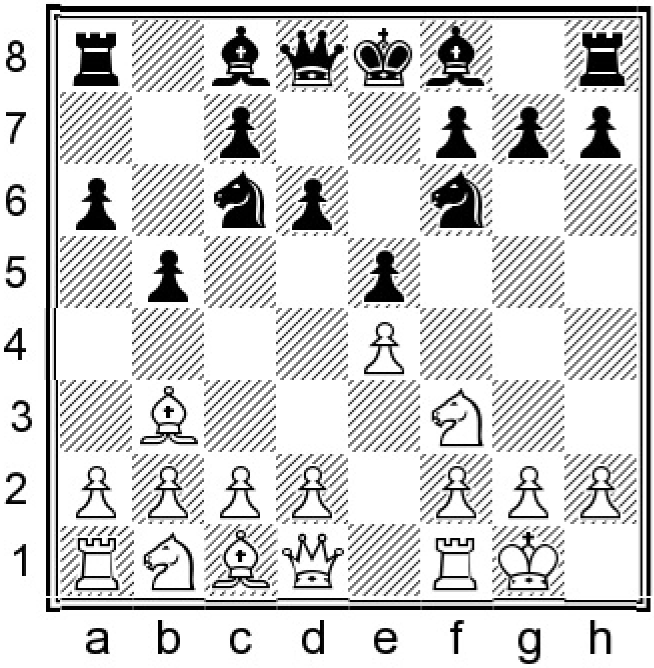
Game 2

A surprising exchange

Fischer acquired a mastery of the Ruy Lopez (or Spanish Opening) from a very early age. In this game he carried out a surprising piece exchange which gave him the advantage, because "It's not the pieces that leave the board that are important, but the ones that remain." (Tarrasch).

Robert Fischer
Attilio Di Camillo
Ruy Lopez [C90]
Eastern States Championship Open, Washington DC (1), 11.1956

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 b5 6.♗b3 d6



7.c3

> **Question:** Black has employed an unusual move order; with the bishop already on b3, isn't it strong to attack f7 with 7.♘g5?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Black's line is actually quite playable, because he can respond to this attack with a manoeuvre that is also seen in some other lines: 7...d5! 8.exd5 ♘d4!, and Black is fine.

7...♗g4

Instead of continuing with the classical 7...♗e7, or 7...♘a5 8.♗c2 c5, Black tries to restrain White's d4 advance.

8.h3

One of Fischer's characteristics from a very young age was that he generally forced the enemy bishops to commit themselves, either by exchanging or choosing a particular diagonal of retreat.

8...♗h5 9.d3

> **Question:** Surely forcing White to play this modest move is a small triumph for Black, isn't it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: It’s not all positive though; the black bishop on h5 is exposed to the typical Spanish manoeuvre ♘d2–f1–g3, not to mention an opportune g4, and it can easily become passive.

9...♗e7 10.♘bd2 0-0 11.♖e1 ♕d7?!

Black made this unnecessary move for tactical reasons. It was preferable to play the more usual manoeuvre 11...♘a5, followed by ...c5.

Question: I don’t understand; what are the tactical reasons that you are referring to?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Black is preventing 12.g4?! due to 12...♘xg4! 13.hxg4 ♕xg4+ and after 14.♔f1 (if 14.♔h2? then 14...♗g5, while 14.♔h1 invites a draw by repetition after 14...♕h3+) Black has good compensation for the piece and can prepare the ...f5 break with 14...♘a5 and, if necessary, ...♔h8.

12.♘f1

The snag with 11...♕d7 is that it doesn’t prevent White from continuing with his original plan.

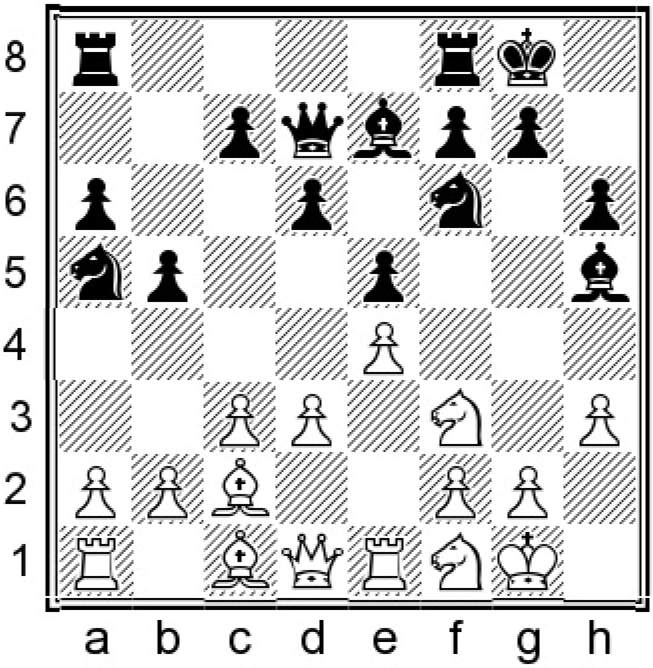
12...♘a5 13.♗c2 h6

Question: That’s a strange move; what’s its purpose?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The idea is to relieve the overcrowding on the kingside at an opportune moment by playing ...♘h7, followed by ...♘g5 or ...♗g5.

Nevertheless, it’s not clear that this is better than 13...c5.



Exercise: How did the thirteen-year-old Bobby Fischer continue here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

14.g4!

More ambitious than 14.♘g3 ♗g6 15.♘h4 c5, since capturing on g6 fails to achieve much; White would be a little better after 16.♘hf5, but with this advance Fischer is looking for more.

Logically the move needs to hold up tactically, but now 14...♘xg4? Is unsound, as after 15.hxg4 the initiative black evaporates; Black has nothing after 15...♗xg4 16.♘e3 (or 16.d4), while if 15...♕xg4+ White can now play 16.♘g3 ♕xf3 (or 16...f5 17.♘h2) 17.♘xh5.

14...♗g6 15.♘g3 ♘h7 16.♘f5 ♘b7?

Black retreats the knight in order to help bolster the defence via d8 and e6, if appropriate, but White will be able to exploit the fact there is now a tactical weakness (a loose piece).

16...♗g5 is also unconvincing, due to 17.♘xg5 ♘xg5 18.h4 ♘e6 19.g5, and the other idea, 16...♘g5, can be answered either by the quiet move 17.♔g2, clearing the back rank for the rook on e1, or by taking on g5, followed by h4.

Therefore, once again the best option appears to be to play the most natural move 16...c5.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

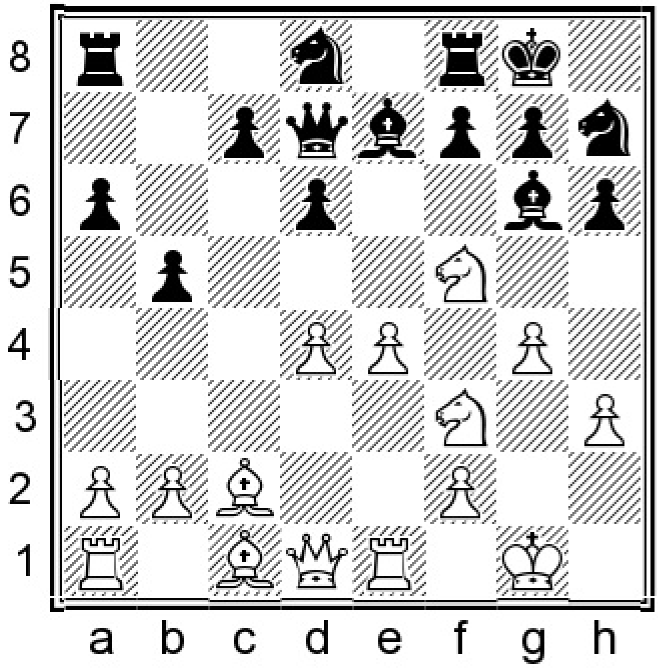
17.d4!

He seized the opportunity to occupy the centre.

17...exd4

This concession is forced, since the e5-pawn cannot be supported; 17...f6? loses to 18.dxe5, threatening 19.♕d5+, while 17...♕e6? fails to 18.♗b3.

18.cxd4 ♘d8



Exercise: What did Fischer play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19.♘xe7+!

This move is slightly reminiscent of another famous piece exchange by Fischer, against Petrosian in the 7th game of their 1971 Buenos Aires match. (Game 54).

This is perhaps Capablanca's influence, reflected in his phrase "clear the position of dead wood," in other words eliminate superfluous pieces.

Of course, making this exchange is not so obvious to simple mortals; the knight had carried out a long manoeuvre to reach the strong position on f5 and now it is exchanged for a not very active bishop which has only moved once.

We should note that this was not the only attractive continuation: it was also possible to gain space with 19.d5, when 19...♗xf5 (if 19...♗f6 then 20.h4) 20.gxf5 ♗f6 is favourable to White, e.g. 21.a4 ♖b8 22.♔h2 (keeping in reserve the option of 22.axb5 axb5 23.♖a7), with the idea of 23.♖g1.

Also interesting was 19.e5, preventing 19...♘e6? due to 20.d5, and with the idea of answering 19...♘c6 with, among other possibilities, 20.e6! fxe6 21.♘xh6+ gxh6 22.♗xg6.

Finally, 19.h4 was also to be considered, but Fischer preferred to follow a clear plan.

19...♕xe7

Exercise: How did Fischer justify his exchange on e7?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20.d5!

With the idea of ♘d4, which more or less forces Black's next move.

20...c5 21.♗f4!

The structure has changed and now resembles a Modern Benoni. As usual, White will be looking for an opportune moment to break with e4-e5.

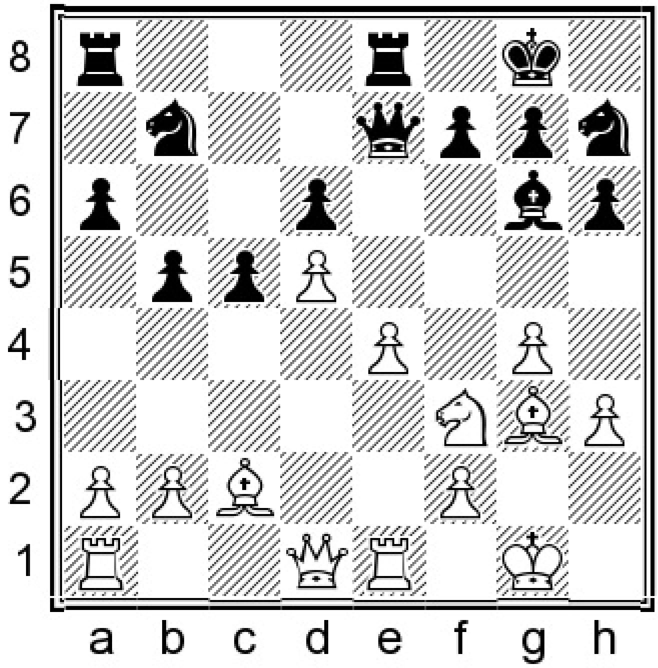
21...♘b7 22.♗g3!

Question: Why such a cautious move? Was it really necessary?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The alternative was to break right away with e5 but Fischer preferred to postpone it until it could be played in more favourable conditions. After 22.e5 ♗xc2 23.♕xc2 ♖ae8! 24.exd6 ♕f6, Black regains the pawn and has fewer problems than in the game.

22...♖fe8



Exercise: What did White play?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23.a4!

Further preparation White wants to open a second front, so that Black has two things to worry about: the opening of the queenside and the e5-break.

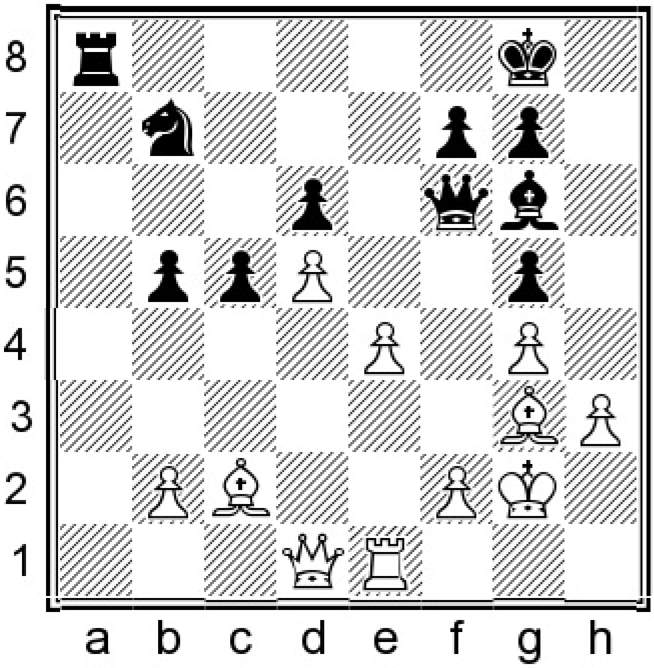
23...♕f6

In the event of 23...♘g5 White isn't forced to exchange on g5 but can play 24.♘d2!, since 24...♘xh3+? loses a piece after 25.♔g2 ♘g5 26.f4 and 27.f5.

24.axb5 axb5 25.♔g2! ♘g5

White benefits from the opening of the queenside after 25...♕xb2? 26.♖b1 ♕f6 27.♖xb5, followed by 28.e5, or first 28.♕b1.

26.♘xg5 hxg5 27.♖xa8 ♖xa8



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

28.e5!

The moment has come; despite the previous exchanges, this break remains strong. White gains a passed pawn and Black has to worry about his weak pawns on the queenside.

28...♗xc2 29.♕xc2 dxe5

29...♕e7 would not change much; White could continue with 30.♕d2 or 30.♖e3.

30.♗xe5

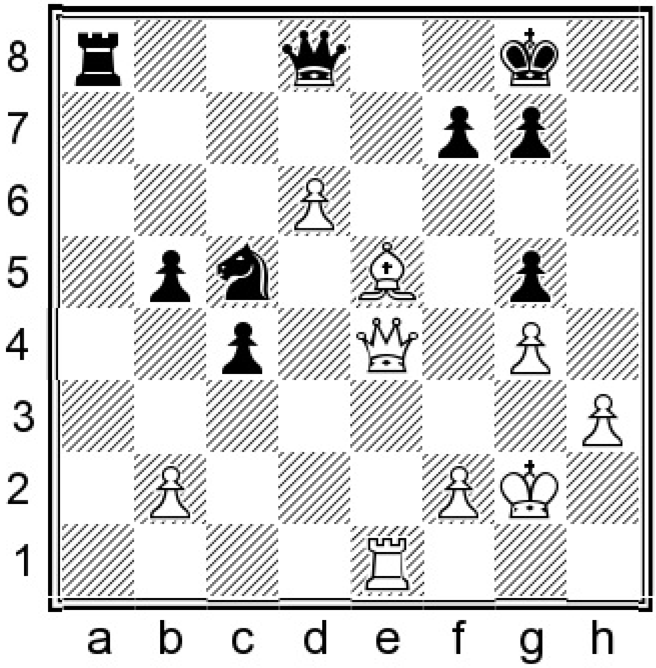
Fischer wants to guarantee the advance of the passed pawn; also attractive was 30.♖xe5, with an eye on g5, and after e.g. 30...c4 31.♕d2 ♘d6 32.♕e3 ♖a2 33.♕c5, White has a clear advantage. (Müller).

30...♕d8 31.d6 c4?!

Eliminating the d6-pawn was not satisfactory: after 31...♘xd6 32.♕xc5 ♘c4 33.♕xb5 ♕d3 White can play 34.♕c6, followed by 35.♗c3, with a healthy extra pawn and active pieces.

31...♖a6 32.♖d1 ♕d7 has been suggested and slightly better, but after 33.♗g3 the difficulties persist, e.g. the exchange 33...♘xd6?! 34.♕xc5 leads to an ending a pawn down after 34...♘e4 35.♖xd7 ♘xc5 36.♖d5.

32.♕e4 ♘c5



33.♕c6?!

Question: Why is this dubious? It seems to attack everything and looks good to me.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes, it looks good, but it’s much weaker than 33.♕d5!, as we shall see.

33...♘d3?

Black makes the most natural move, but misses his opportunity. It was stronger to play 33...♖c8!, when White has nothing after 34.♕xb5? ♘d3 35.♖a1 (not 35.♖e2? ♖c5) 35...♖a8 (now if 35...♖c5? then 36.♕b7) 36.♖a3 (or 36.♖xa8 ♕xa8+ 37.f3 ♘e1+ 38.♔f2 ♕xf3+, and Black has perpetual check) 36...♖xa3 37.bxa3 ♕a8+ 38.f3 ♘e1+ 39.♔f2 and once again Black has 39...♕xf3+ 40.♔xe1 ♕e3+ 41.♔d1 ♕d3+ 42.♔c1 ♕f1+ and the white king is unable to evade the checks.

After 34.♕d5 ♘d3 it isn’t possible to play 35.♖e3? due to 35...♖c5 36.♕d4 ♕a8+!, followed by 37...♖d5; so White has to play 35.♖a1.

34.♖e3 ♖c8

The passed pawn gains in strength after 34...♘xe5 35.♖xe5, threatening 36.d7, and after 35...♖c8 36.♕d5, the threat is ♖e7, against which there is no good defence, for instance if 36...♕d7 then White wins with 37.♖e7 ♕c6 38.♕xc6, followed by 39.♖e8+ and d7.

Exercise: What is the best queen move now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

35.♕b7!

We know that White should avoid 35.♕xb5? and 35.♕d5? due to 35...♖c5.

35...♖b8 36.♕d5 ♘b4

Blocking the pawn with 36...♕d7 fails to 37.♗g3, and there is no good defence against 38.♖e7.

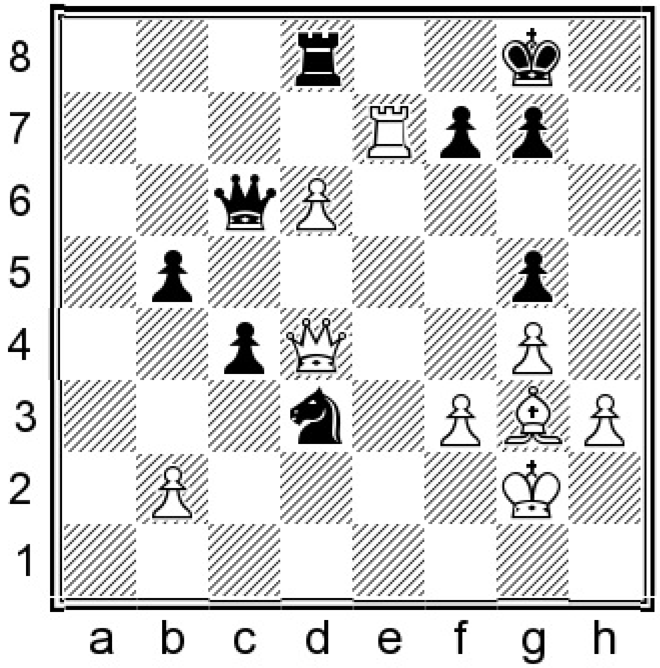
36...♘xe5 also loses, to 37.♖xe5, followed by 38.d7 or 38.♖e7.

37.♕c5 ♘d3 38.♕d4 ♖b6?!

Even worse is 38...♘xe5 39.♖xe5 ♖b7 40.♕e4! ♖b8 41.♕d5 and once again Black is defenceless.

38...♕d7 is somewhat more tenacious, after which 39.♗xg7 is interesting but complicated, e.g. 39...♘f4+ 40.♔g3 ♘e6 41.♖xe6 ♕xe6 42.♗h8! (forcing the black queen to decentralise and better than 42.♗f6 ♖b7) 42...♕g6 43.♗f6 ♖b7 44.♕e5 ♔h7 45.♗xg5.

Possibly Fischer would have chosen something clearer, such as 39.♗g3!, e.g. 39...♕c6+ 40.f3 ♖d8 41.♖e7!.

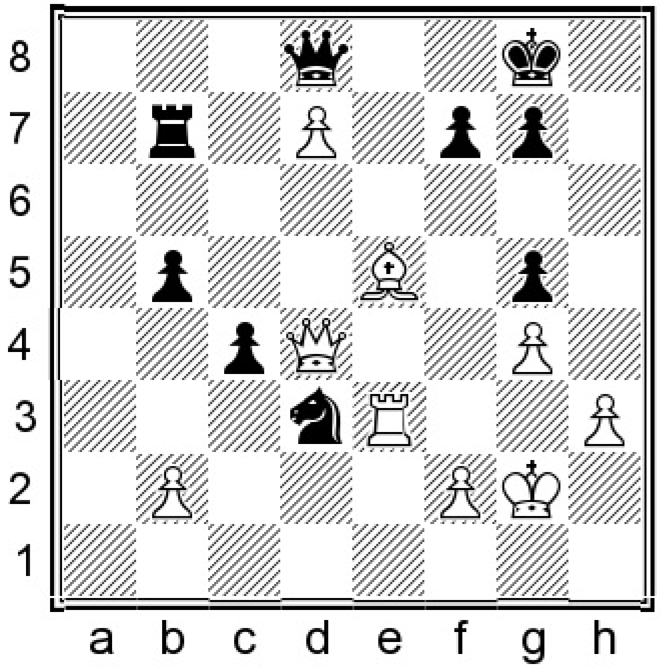


Now if 41...♘b4 then 42.♕e4, or 42.d7 ♘d5 43.♖e8+, and wins the knight; Black can then take on b2, but the pawns are not dangerous, e.g. 43...♖xe8 44.dxe8=♕+ ♕xe8 45.♕xd5 ♕e2+ 46.♗f2 ♕xb2 47.♔g3, followed by ♗d4, when the attack is more important than the passed pawns.

In the event of 41...♘c5 (preventing 42.d7), then 42.♖c7 ♘e6 43.♕xg7+ ♔xg7 44.♖xc6 leaves Black with a very difficult defensive task.

39.d7 ♖b7

The pawn triumphs after 39...♘xe5 40.♖xe5 ♖e6 41.♖c5 ♕a8+ 42.♕d5.



Exercise: How did Fischer finish off the game?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

40.♗c7!

A beautiful manoeuvre, exploiting the power of the passed pawn.

40...♘f4+

Exercise: How should White respond to this check?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

41.♔f1!

Now there is no defence; in fact any retreat of the king would work, but not 41.♕xf4? ♕xd7! or 41.♗xf4? ♖xd7.

1–0

(back to the text) In my opinion it ranks with, among others, 18...♖a3!! of Pillsbury - Lasker, St Petersburg 1896,

18.♖xf7!! of Botvinnik - Portisch, Monte Carlo 1968,

or the sequence begun with 24.♖xd4!! of Kasparov - Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 1999.

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1957

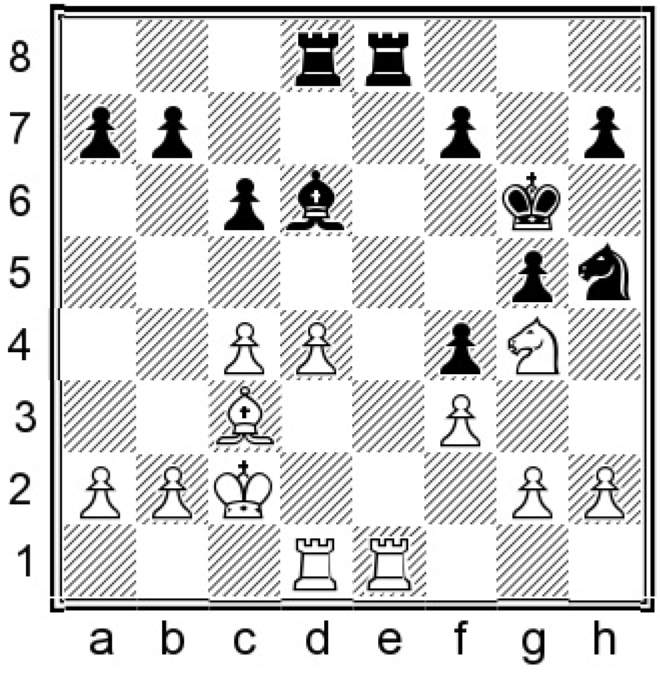
Game 3

Mastery of the art of simplification

White had the better structure from an early stage of the game and which in theory would give him an advantage in the endgame, which is why Fischer did not avoid exchanges. White retained a slight advantage into the ending and the game was decided in precisely that area. Fischer carried out the most appropriate exchanges and Black did not.

Robert Fischer
William Addison
Caro-Kann Defence [B11]
United States Open, Cleveland, (11), 15.08.1957

1.e4 c6 2.♘c3 d5 3.♘f3 dxe4 4.♘xe4 ♘f6 5.♘xf6+ exf6 6.♗c4 ♗d6 7.♕e2+ ♕e7 8.♕xe7+ ♔xe7 9.d4 ♗f5 10.♗b3 ♖e8 11.♗e3 ♔f8 12.0-0-0 ♘d7 13.c4 ♖ad8 14.♗c2 ♗xc2 15.♔xc2 f5 16.♖he1 f4 17.♗d2 ♘f6 18.♘e5 g5 19.f3 ♘h5 20.♘g4 ♔g7 21.♗c3 ♔g6



White to play

White has a pawn majority on the queenside, which gives him an advantage, because it can eventually produce a passed pawn, while Black's kingside majority cannot easily do the same because of his doubled pawns.

Exercise: How did Fischer try to exploit this advantage?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22.♖xe8!

The first step towards advancing his queenside pawns – Fischer doesn't allow Black to exchange on e1, because the white rook is more useful on d1 to support the advance of his majority.

22...♖xe8

Exercise: How did he continue the manoeuvre?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

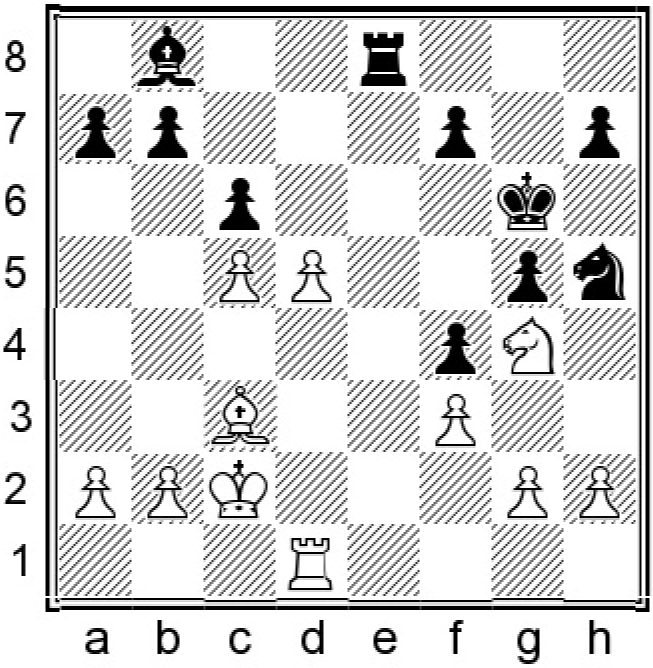
23.c5!

And 24.d5 will follow, without allowing the centre to be blocked.

The engines prefer 23.d5, but Fischer probably thought that 23...c5 would be more difficult to break down, although White keeps the advantage.

23...♗b8 24.d5

24.♘e5+ ♗xe5 25.dxe5 was suggested, but after 25...♘g7! (with the idea of 26...♘f5) Black has no problems; the queenside majority has vanished and the bishop is no better than the knight, e.g. 26.♖d7 ♖b8 27.♔d3 ♘e6 28.♔c4 ♔g7, planning ...♔f8–e8.



24...cxd5?

This exchange places no obstacles in the way of White progress.

Question: Explain to me something of what’s happening here.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The suggestion 24.♘e5+ was made because 24...f5! was considered to be strong (and necessary), expelling the knight.

Then if 25.♘f2 Black could play 25...♖e2+ and following the exchange of rooks the pawn on d5 would fall. So it would appear that White is forced to play 25.dxc6, when after the cautious 25...bxc6 (accepting the piece with 25...fxg4 26.cxb7 gxf3 27.gxf3 ♘g7, although questionable in practice, is not bad according to the engines available in early 2021) 26.♘f2 ♘f6, which isn’t very promising; Black threatens ...♘d5 and White’s advantage is minimal after 27.♗xf6 ♔xf6 28.♘d3, since the majority is no longer as strong and the black bishop can be activated.

But White can possibly sacrifice the pawn with 25.♘f2!, and after 25...♖e2+ 26.♖d2 ♖xd2+ 27.♔xd2 cxd5 28.♘d3 ♘f6 29.b4 the missing pawn seems unimportant compared to the queenside majority; White would improve the positions of his three pieces before continuing to advance them, with a bigger advantage than after 25.dxc6.

25.♖xd5 f5

Now after 25...♖e2+? there no need for White to exchange rooks and instead he can play the very strong 26.♔d3! ♖xg2 27.♖d8 ♗c7 28.♖g8+! (slightly more precise than 28.♖c8 f5 29.♖g8+ ♔f7 30.♘h6+, which is also effective) 28...♔f5 29.♖c8, and wins decisive material.

26.♘e5+ ♗xe5

Exercise (simple): How best to recapture on e5?

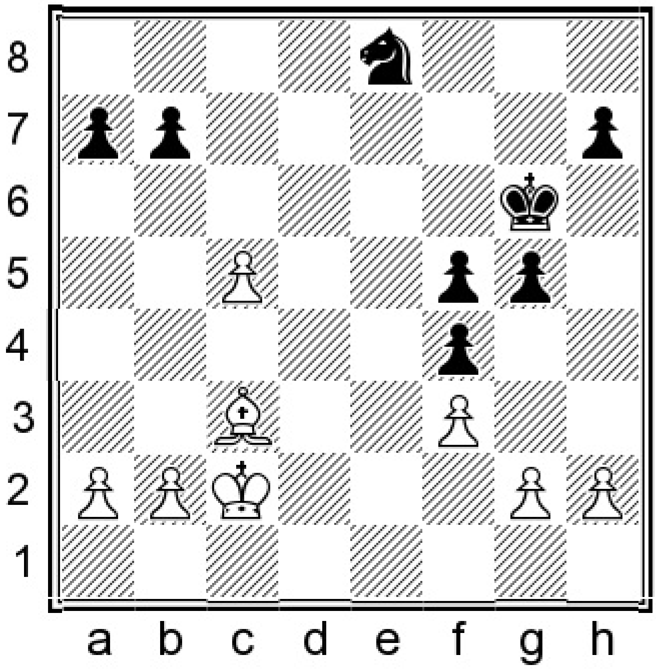
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

27.♖xe5!

And Black must accept the exchange of rooks or else allow 28.♖e7, which also leads to certain defeat.

27...♘f6 28.♖xe8 ♘xe8



Exercise (simple): Why was Fischer so keen to exchange the rooks?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29.♗e5!

Because we have reached a typical case where the knight is dominated by the bishop. The virtual extra pawn has become a real one and White now has a winning position.

29...♔h5

29...♘f6 leads to a lost pawn ending after 30.♗xf6 ♔xf6 31.♔d3 ♔e5 32.♔c4, followed by b4, and at the very least the white king will end up going to the kingside and capturing the defenceless pawns, while the black monarch stops White’s passed pawn.

30.♔d3 g4 31.b4 a6 32.a4 gxf3 33.gxf3 ♔h4

Black’s counterattack is very slow, but by now there was no alternative.

34.b5 axb5

Or 34...♔h3 35.c6 bxc6 36.bxa6.

35.a5

Also good was 35.axb5, followed by 36.b6 and 37.c6.

35...♔h3 36.c6!

If 36...bxc6 then 37.a6, while 36...b6 37.axb6 also wins for White.

1–0

Game 4

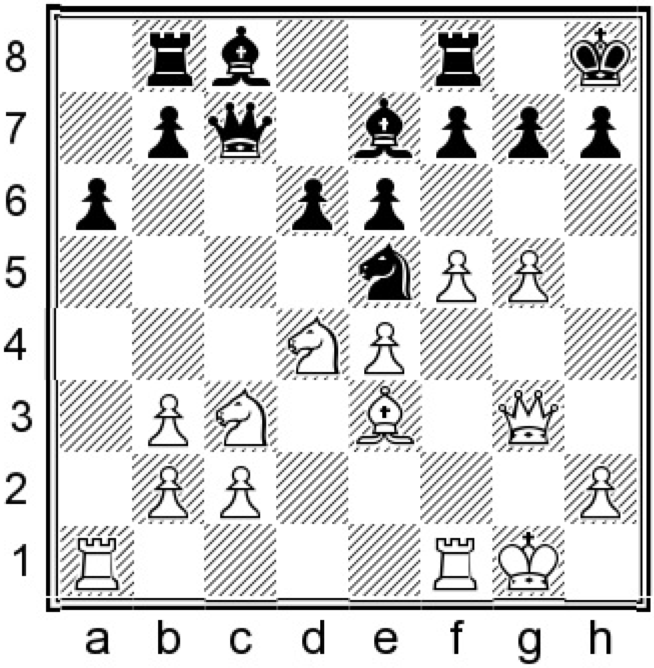
A brutal attack

There are not many games where Fischer launches an all-out attack against the black castled position. It was a winning attack, but the position was so complicated that mistakes were inevitable, although over the board they were very difficult to spot.

After a tempting but objectively mistaken sacrifice, Black had the chance to escape, but it was practically impossible to find the artistic refutation that would have given Black a half point.

Robert Fischer
Rodolfo Cardoso
Sicilian Defence [B88]
New York (m/2), 09.1957

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗c4 e6 7.0-0 ♗e7 8.♗e3 0-0 9.♗b3 ♘c6 10.f4 ♘a5 11.♕f3 ♕c7 12.g4 ♘xb3 13.axb3 ♖b8 14.g5 ♘d7 15.f5 ♘e5 16.♕g3 ♔h8



White to move

White’s offensive on the kingside is well advanced, with an attack which is to all appearances very dangerous.

Exercise: How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17.♘f3!

As Kasparov indicates, the black position is held together by the strong knight on e5, which is why Fischer is preparing to exchange it. This is a “human” decision, guided by logic.

The engines are guided more by calculation, which doesn’t always coincide with what logic suggests. The defensive strength of the knight is unimportant to the engines, which prefer immediate attack, starting with 17.♖f4! targeting h7, followed by ♖h4 and ♕h3. This line might objectively be stronger, but this type of decision, supported only by calculation, is for the present understandable only by the computers.

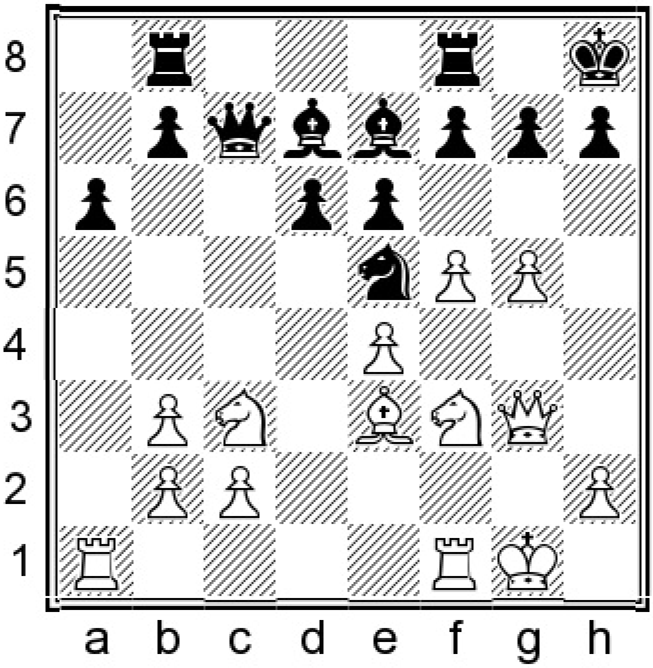
17...♘xf3+?

A move which looks weak and is bad; it helps the rook enter the attack without gaining anything important in return. 17...f6? is also losing due to 18.g6!.

Given the circumstances, it would have been very difficult to opt for Kasparov's suggestion of 17...♘c6, which he considered was best.

White could then strengthen his position with 18.♖ad1, before taking any other measures. He could also consider continuing the attack with 18.♕h3, e.g. 18...exf5 19.exf5 ♕d7 20.♘d5 (20.♘h4 was analysed by Kasparov) 20...♕xf5 21.♕xf5 ♗xf5 22.♘d4 ♗h3 23.♘xc6 bxc6 24.♘xe7 ♗xf1 25.♔xf1 (or 25.♖xf1 ♖be8 26.♘f5 f6 27.♗d4) 25...♖be8 26.♗f4 ♖xe7 27.♗xd6 ♖ee8 28.♗xf8 ♖xf8 29.♖xa6, and in both cases there is a clear advantage to White in the ending.

Rather than retreating the knight, the developing move 17...♗d7 was to be considered.



Here 18.♘xe5 is tempting, with the idea of 18...dxe5 19.♕h4 and then bringing the rook to h3 via f3; let us examine some possible defensive tries:

a) If 19...♖bc8 then White wins with 20.f6 gxf6 (20...♗d8 21.g6! leads to a quick mate) 21.gxf6 ♗c5 22.♔h1 (or the move order 22.♖f3 ♗xe3+ 23.♔h1) 22...♗xe3 23.♖f3 ♗f4 24.♖h3 h6 25.♕xh6+! and mate.

b) If 19...♖g8 then 20.♖f3! exf5 21.♘d5 ♕d6 22.exf5! ♗d8 (once again, if 22...♕xd5 then 23.♕xh7+!) 23.♖d1, with the idea of 24.♘c3 ♕c6 25.♘e4, with a winning attack.

Exercise: However, White should delay 18.♘xe5 dxe5 19.♕h4 because there is a much better defence than the two indicated above – what is it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The exchange on e5 allows 19...♗c5!, and the attack evaporates.

White should begin the attack with 18.♕h4!.

18.♖xf3 b5

Exercise: How did Fischer continue the attack?

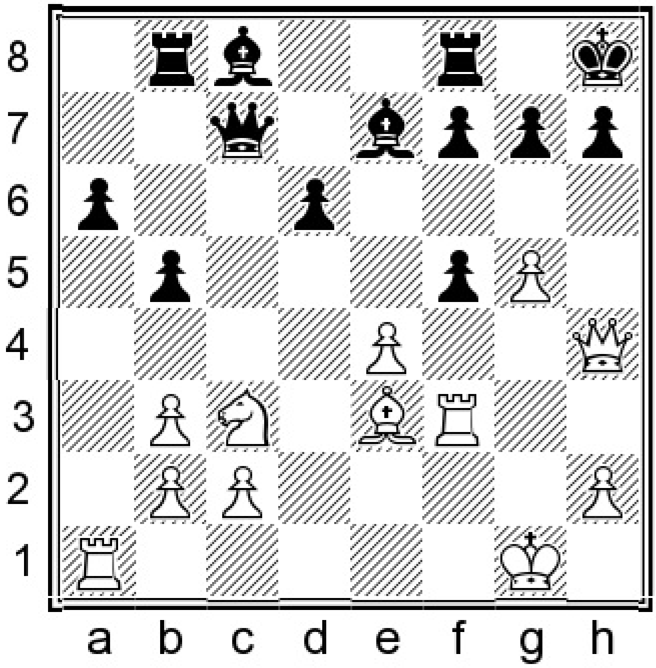
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19.♕h4!

With sights set on h7, planning 20.♖h3, and then if 20...h6 21.f6! wins.

19...exf5



20.exf5

There were many very promising alternatives and it was difficult to distinguish the best.

20.♗d4! was very strong, e.g. 20...fxe4 21.♘d5 ♕d7 22.♗xg7+! ♔xg7 23.♕h6+ ♔h8 24.g6 ♕g4+ 25.♖g3, and wins.

20.♘d5! was also crushing, e.g. 20...♕b7 21.♖h3 h6 22.♗d4 ♔g8 23.♗xg7!, and wins.

Finally, it was also worth considering 20.♖h3 h6 21.♗d4 ♔g8 22.♘d5 ♕b7 23.♗f6!.

Fischer preferred to keep all his options open and maintain the threats of f6 and, in the future, g6.

20...♕c6

“The only chance.” (Kasparov).

21.♖af1

Again “a logical move in accordance with the position,” commented Kasparov; White includes his most distant piece in the attack.

The current engines (early 2021) prefer 21.♘e4!, assessing that White’s dynamic superiority on the kingside is already sufficient to create an very strong attack, e.g. if 21...♖e8 (21...♕xc2? is punished with 22.f6) then 22.♗d4! is crushing, with the threat of 22...-- 23.♗xg7+ ♔xg7 24.♕h6+ ♔g8 25.♘f6+ and a quick mate.

Kasparov pointed out another way: 22.f6 ♗f8 23.g6! fxg6 24.♗d4 ♗g4 25.fxg7+ ♗xg7 26.♘f6! h5 27.♖f4, but he thought that Fischer’s intuition was telling him that he could achieve more than this advantage with his rook move.

21...♗b7

Black gains some practical counter-chances thanks to this battery, but his position is objectively lost, as the black king doesn’t have enough defenders.

Exercise: How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22.♗d4!

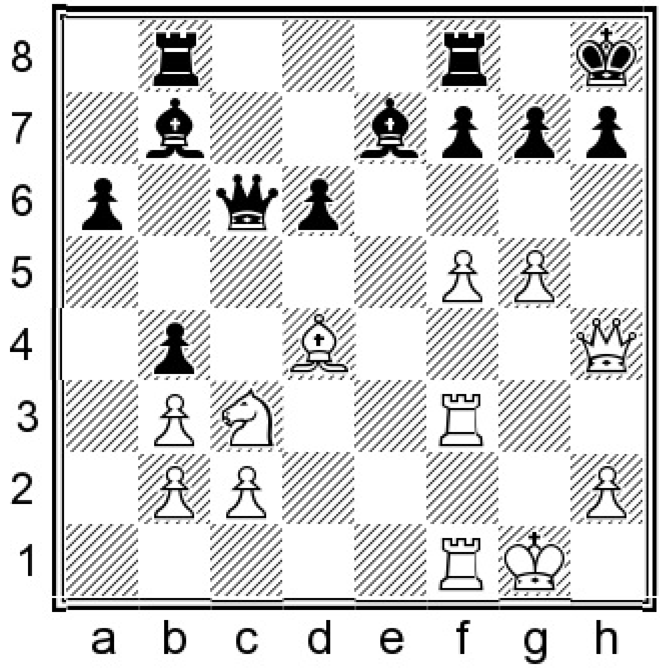
A we have already shown, Black is weak not only on h7 but also g7.

22.♕h5, unpinning the g-pawn and threatening 23.g6, was the alternative, but Fischer’s move is better.

22...b4

22...♕xf3 23.♖xf3 ♗xf3 loses to 24.♗xg7+! ♔xg7 25.♕h6+ ♔h8 26.g6.

22...♖fe8 is refuted with 23.♗xg7+! ♔xg7 24.♕h6+ ♔g8 25.g6! ♕c5+ 26.♔h1 hxg6 27.fxg6 fxg6 28.♕xg6+ ♔h8 29.♘e4! And “after this quiet move Black has no defence: 29...♗xe4 30.♕xe4 ♕h5 31.♕d4+ ♕e5 32.♖h3+ ♔g8 33.♕d3!, and it is time to resign.” (Kasparov).



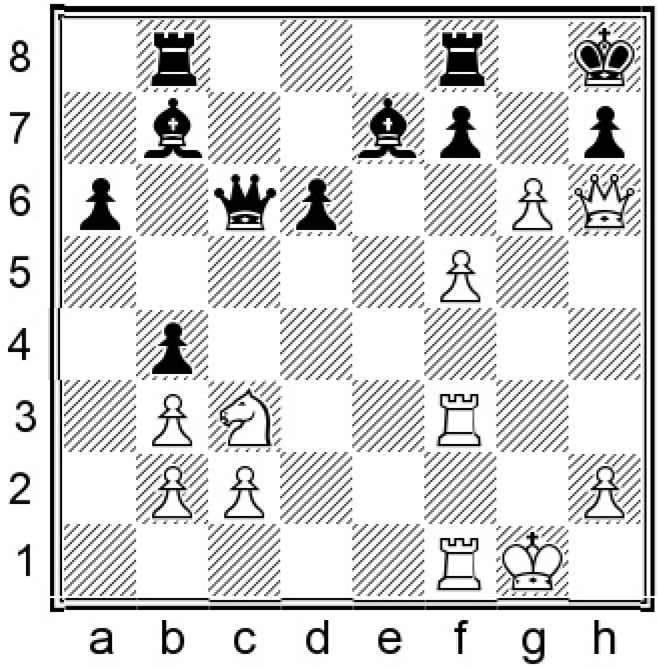
23.♗xg7+?

"At such an age (and not only at such a one!) it is excusable that White should be tempted by a pretty 'winning combination,' wrote Kasparov.

Unpinning with 23.♕h5! was decisive, e.g. 23...♔g8 24.f6, or 23...bxc3 24.g6! winning; if 23...♕xf3 24.♖xf3 ♗xf3 then 25.♗xg7+! ♔xg7 26.♕h6+ ♔h8 27.g6, and although the resource 27...fxg6 28.fxg6 ♖f7 prevents mate and even gives Black a temporary material advantage, the black position is untenable after 29.gxf7 bxc3 30.bxc3 and Black is curiously helpless; Black cannot protect both his loose bishops and still prevent a possible check on e8, or a winning check on the diagonal a1-h8.

If 23...f6 then 24.g6 h6 25.♗e3!, with the idea of ♗xh6 (Lombardy), e.g. 25...♕xf3 26.♖xf3 ♗xf3 27.♕xf3 bxc3 28.♗xh6! gxh6 (if 28...cxb2 then, among other things, 29.♕h5! wins) 29.♕e3, and wins.

23...♔xg7 24.♕h6+ ♔h8 25.g6



25...♕c5+?

"An error in reply" (Kasparov); yes; it is easy to be categorical sitting at home with a computer at your side, but playing the game is a different matter, having to analyse in a limited time complex lines, move after move.

> **Exercise (difficult):** The refutation of Fischer's combination was difficult to find over the board. How can Black defend?

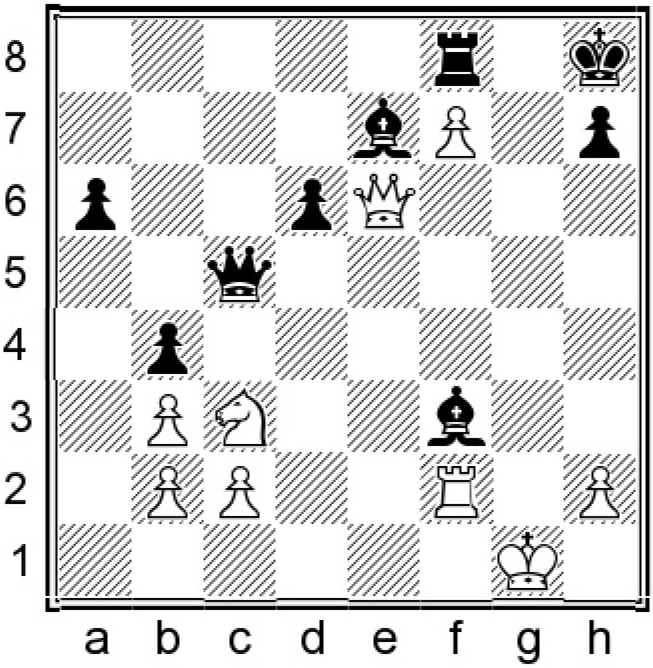
Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Black had marvellous resource 25...fxg6 26.fxg6 ♖f7!!, which would have saved him, e.g. 27.gxf7 ♖f8 28.♕e6! ♕c5+ 29.♖1f2! ♗xf3 30.♘e4! ♕e3 31.♕xe7 ♕e1+ 32.♖f1 ♕e3+ with a draw.

"To foresee such a computer defence at the board was not easy, even for an ultra-strong player." (Kasparov).

There is one matter to be resolved, in the last variation above.

(29...♗xf3)



Exercise: Instead of 30.♘e4!, why can't White play 30.♕xe7?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Because it loses to 30...♖xf7!! and after 31.♕xf7 ♕g5+ it's White who gets mated.

26.♖1f2

And it's practically over. Black can only prevent mate by giving up decisive amounts of material.

26...fxg6 27.fxg6 ♕g5+ 28.♕xg5 ♗xg5 29.♖xf8+ ♖xf8 30.♖xf8+ ♔g7 31.gxh7

1–0

Game 5

Assimilated patterns

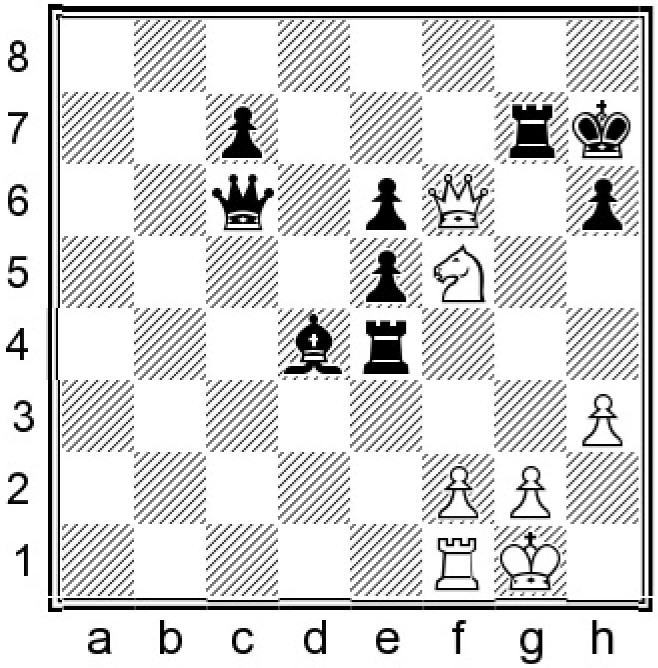
It has been said that the world's better chess players have assimilated thousands of patterns, far more than players of standard strength. That helps them find better moves; this might be the case in our game.

GM Helgi Olafsson was Fischer's friend and wrote *Bobby Fischer Comes Home*, an excellent book about his last stage in Iceland, in which he tells the following story:

On the 9th of December 2006 the final of the Icelandic Rapid Championship took place and Olafsson was commentating on it for Icelandic television. On his return home he received a phone call from Fischer. "I saw you on the television today," he told him, "you know, the guy could have played take on g2 and then played ♖h4”. Olafsson was astonished and very pleased that Fischer had called to tell him about his discovery. Olafsson began to criticise certain moves from the game but Fischer did not seem to want to get involved in that. Olafsson later mentioned all this to a journalist, who was enthusiastic about publishing an article about it. Olafsson then sought and received Fischer’s permission to write about what had happened, as follows:

“The phone rang and Bobby Fischer was on the line. He told me he had seen the broadcast. The topic of our discussion was the final position of the game:

Bragi Thorfinnsson
Arnar Gunnarsson
Reykjavík, 12.2006



Black to play

In this position Arnar blundered by playing **37...♔g8** and naturally there came **38.♕xg7++**.

The explanation is simple, he was ahead of himself as he had intended to play 37...♕d7 first [*and only then answer* 38.♕xh6+ *with* 38...♔g8 *ZF*.]

In reaction to that move Fischer pointed out an ingenious combination: 37...♖xg2+ 38.♔h1 ♖h4!! - note that 38.♔xg2 does not work because of 38...♖g4+ and 39...♕g2++.

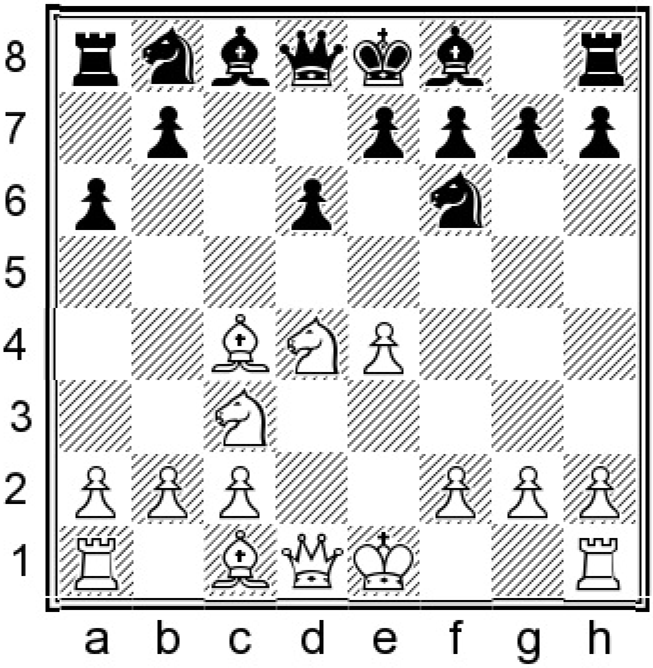
After 38...♖h4 39.♕f7+ fails because of the discovered check 39...♖g7+, while 39.f3 is answered by 39...♖g1+ and mates, as Fischer pointed out: 40.♔h2 ♕c2+ or 40.♖xg1 ♕xf3+, etc.”

In this sequence of discovered checks Olafsson discerned a pattern deriving from a game from when Fischer was fourteen years old.

Robert Fischer

James Sherwin
Sicilian Defence [B87]
US Championship New York (7), 12.1957

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗c4



“After the text White must be prepared to sacrifice the e-pawn in some variations” wrote Fischer in *Bobby Fischer’s Games of Chess*.

“Fischer’s favourite move, which brought him many wins,” commented Kasparov, adding later (under some pressure) that theory of this sharp variation was then “in the stone age” and that “the real development of the variation occurred only in the early 1990s.”

Question: What a striking comment. But doesn’t that apply to almost all modern opening lines?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Since you mention it, yes. Kasparov added that he himself played 6.♗c4 several times and that Short employed it against him in their 1993 match.

6...e6 7.0-0 b5 8.♗b3 b4 9.♘b1

Fischer, quoted in *Shakmaty v. SSSR* 1958 Nº6 commented: “Where should the knight go - a4 or b1? I. O. Lipnitsky, in his book *Questions of Modern Chess Theory*, highly recommends the move played.”

The idea of this retreat is to play ♘d2–c4, but later it became clear that 9.♘a4 is better, and “if

9...♘xe4 10.♗e3, with a strong attack," according to Fischer, and perhaps even better is 10.♖e1.

9...♗d7

"But it seems that after 9...♘xe4 10.♕f3 ♗b7 11.♗a4+ ♘d7 12.♗c6 (12.♘c6 ♘ec5!) 12...♗xc6 13.♘xc6 ♕b6 14.♕xe4 d5, Black remains a pawn up with a good game," added Fischer, showing that he now disagreed with Lipnitsky's analysis and with his own choice of move.

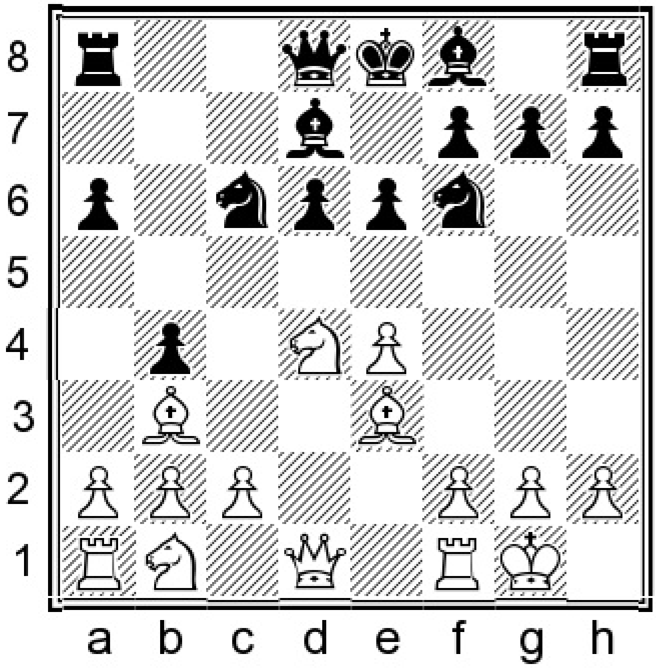
Question: Why did Black not take the pawn?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: For practical reasons, replies Fischer: "Black, however, was not familiar with this variation and decided to play it safe. The text prepares for 10...♘c6."

10.♗e3 ♘c6

The inclusion of the two bishop moves favours White. "If 10...♘xe4 11.♕f3 d5 12.c4! bxc3 13.♘xc3 with excellent compensation for the sacrificed pawn." (Fischer).



11.f3

It would be interesting to continue in the gambit spirit by playing 11.a3!.

11...♗e7

Black continues to “play safe,” but it was preferable to play 11...♘a5, neutralising the strong bishop.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

12.c3!

Fischer wants to develop his knight to c3, therefore he rejected 11.♘d2. At the same time he prevents the exchange of his favourite bishop.

12...bxc3?!

Too submissive; Fischer commented: “If Black tries to maintain his pawn on b4 by 12...a5 then White plays 13.♘b5! ♕b8 14.a4! and White stands better,” but nevertheless, this is less of a concession than facilitating White’s development by taking on c3.

13.♘xc6 ♗xc6

Exercise: What is the best line after 13...cxb2 14.♘xd8 bxa1=♕?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: White gains an advantage after 15.♗d4 ♕xd4+ 16.♕xd4 ♖xd8 17.♕a7!, but it is even better to insert one of the intermediate moves that Fischer liked so much: after 15.♘xf7! ♔xf7 16.♗d4 ♕xd4+ 17.♕xd4 White has a decisive advantage, because to White’s material advantage we can add Black’s damaged structure and weak king.

14.♘xc3 0-0 15.♖c1 ♕b8

The current engines prefer to free Black’s position with 15...d5, conceding an isolated pawn on d5, but with the opening up of the game White’s weakness along the g1-a7 diagonal is exposed and White’s queenside pawns become targets, and after e.g. 15...d5 16.♘xd5 ♘xd5 17.♗xd5 ♗xd5 18.exd5 exd5 Black’s disadvantage is minimal.

Exercise: “After this move Black finds himself in a tough spot. Better would have been 15...♕d7,” commented Fischer. How did he exploit Black’s move?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16.♘d5!

A thematic offer that is spectacular rather than advantageous, but in practice, if it came as a surprise to Black it would have been a powerful blow.

16...exd5?!

16...♗xd5 17.exd5 ♘xd5 18.♗xd5 exd5 19.b3 was better, and now Black should defend his d5-pawn with 19...♕b7, followed by 20...♖fe8 and/or ...♖ac8, and White has no great advantage.

After the move played, White becomes active on all fronts.

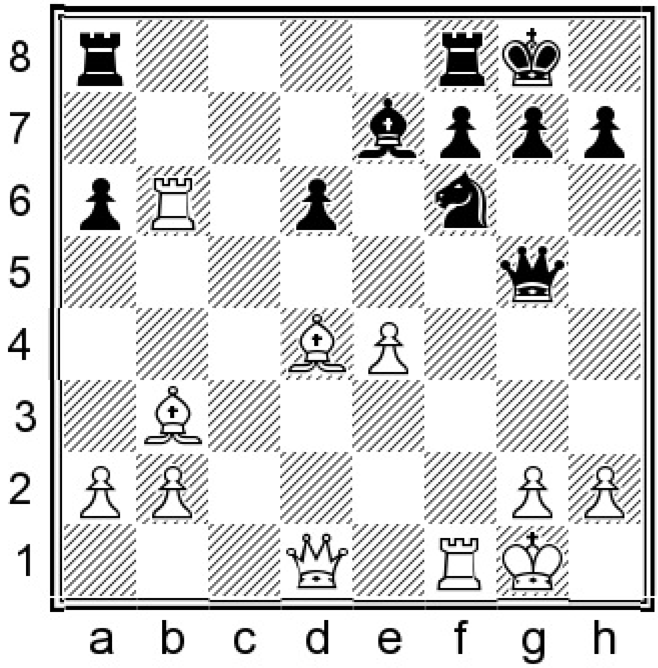
17.♖xc6 dxe4 18.fxe4 ♕b5?!

Black is now seeking activity; the safer alternative was 18...♕b7.

Not 18...♘xe4?! due to 19.♗d5! ♘f6 20.♖b6, and wins the exchange, which is simpler and better than 19.♖xf7! (mentioned by Fischer) 19...♖xf7 20.♗xf7+! ♔xf7 21.♕d5+ ♔f8 22.♕xe4, also with advantage to White.

19.♖b6 ♕e5 20.♗d4! ♕g5

Of course not 20...♕xe4? 21.♖e1.



White has a much better position. His bishops are very strong and Black has weaknesses on a6, d6 and f7. The weakness of the e4-pawn matters less, thanks to White's great dynamic superiority.

But, "a position doesn't win itself" and now we see the young Fischer relax the pressure.

21.♕f3?!

Instead, 21.♖b7! was crushing, when 21...♘xe4? loses material after 22.♖e1 d5 (or 22...♖ac8 23.♖xe4 ♖c1 24.♖bxe7 ♖xd1+ 25.♗xd1) 23.♖xe7! ♕xe7 24.♗xd5, while if 21...♖ae8 then 22.♗a4.

Question: That line doesn't seem too complicated for the Fischer of those years; why did he not play it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The simplest explanation is that he made a tactical error, not seeing Black's reply, but Larry Evans wrote in 1963 that in this period Fischer was sometimes overconfident, "which means that sometimes he forgets that his opponents can also find good moves" and furthermore he suffered from "impetuosity in winning positions."

21...♘d7!

A move praised by Fischer: "A good move. Black offers the sacrifice of a pawn in order to get bishops of opposite colour."

22.♖b7

22.♗xf7+ ♔h8 23.♖b7 ♘e5 is acceptable for Black from the practical point of view, although the sceptical engines of 2021 are unconvinced and capture the pawn.

22...♘e5 23.♕e2 ♗f6

Exercise (simple): Despite the improvement in Black's position, with a strong knight on e5, White is still better. What do you think Fischer played now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24.♔h1!

Contradicting Evans, i.e. respecting the play of his opponent. In the first place, this move prevents

24...♘f3+.

24...a5 25.♗d5 ♖ac8

“Black has been doing his best to wriggle out of a tough position and now threatens 26...♖c1.” (Fischer).

26.♗c3 a4 27.♖a7 ♘g4 28.♖xa4?!

“A pawn is a pawn,” but the rook gives up its dominating position. Instead, 28.♗d2! was better, when 28...♖c2 is punished with 29.♖xf7! ♖xf7 30.♕b5, and wins, while 28...♕g6 can be answered with 29.h3 ♘e5 and now 30.♗f4 or 30.♗c3, and the a4-pawn will not escape.

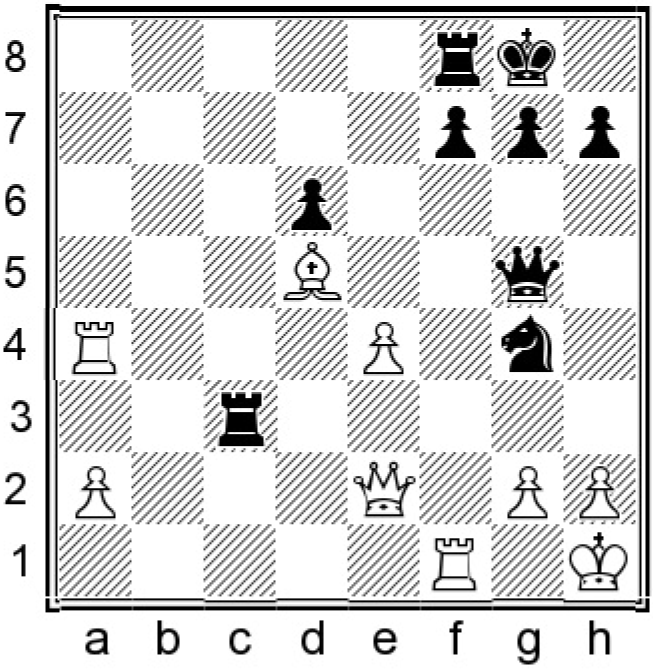
28...♗xc3 29.bxc3 ♖xc3?

We shall soon see that this is based on a miscalculation. It was better to play 29...♘e3 30.♕d2 h6 31.♖c1 and Black has 31...♘xd5 32.♕xg5 hxg5 33.exd5 ♖a8, with a probable draw.

Question: This seems obvious; why didn’t Black play this?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: During the game this wasn’t so clear. Fischer explains it to us: “This is the position that both players have been angling for, Black because he has freed his position and traded off one of White’s powerful bishops, and White because of...”



Exercise: OK, why?

☐ Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

30.♖xf7!!

“The move I had been counting on, which wins in all variations.” (Fischer).

30...♖c1+?

Of course 30...♖xf7 loses to 31.♖a8+.

The only move to keep Black in the game was 30...h5!.

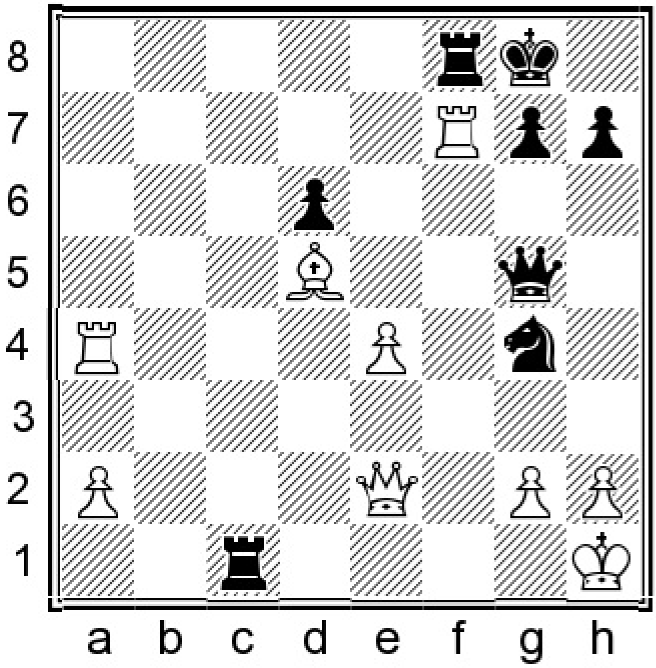
Exercise (difficult): What would Fischer have played in that case?

☐ Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Not 31.♖f3+? ♔h7 32.♖xc3 and now, among other things, there is the spectacular 32...♕d2!, and it is Black who wins.

Also inconclusive is 31.♖xf8+ ♔xf8 32.♕f1+ ♘f6 33.♖c4 ♖xc4 34.♕xc4 ♕f4! (much better than taking on d5, as has been suggested) 35.h3 g5!, or 35.♕c8+ ♔e7 36.♕b7+ ♘d7, threatening mate, followed by ...g5.

Nevertheless, White can gain the advantage with 31.♖c4!, after 31...♖xc4 32.♖xf8+ ♔xf8 33.♕xc4, threatening 34.♕c8+, and the exposure of the black king is more important than the weakness of the white monarch; this will help White to exploit his extra passed pawn.



Exercise: Black's move appears to be very strong, how did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

31.♕f1!!

The key; not 31.♖f1+? ♔h8 and it is Black who wins, e.g. if 32.♖a8? ♖xa8 33.♗xa8 then 33...♕f4! is decisive.

31...h5

Now after 31...♖xf1+ 32.♖xf1+ ♖f7 there is a mate with 33.♖a8+.

Exercise: And what was the final blow struck by White now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

32.♕xc1!

This brutal move is the only way to win.

32...♕h4

Or 32...♕xc1+ 33.♖f1+.

Black could have resigned here.

33.♖xf8+ ♔h7 34.h3 ♕g3 35.hxg4 h4 36.♗e6

1–0

Do you see any pattern in common between the rook discoveries in this game and the Icelandic game?

In *The Early Years* by John Donaldson and Eric Tangborn, they quote an article by Hugh Myers in his book *A Chess Explorer*, which talks about when Fischer, aged 14, won the USA Championship for the first time, on the 7th of January 1958. “It was a snowy evening. I was one of the few people he would listen to (... I don’t think he knew anyone else who owned and loved a 1956 Russian openings book by Lipnitsky, as we both did). So I was the only person to escort Fischer and his mother to the subway station. He was celebrating by throwing snowballs at passing buses! I got him to stop that, telling him he wouldn’t want to see his name in the morning papers both for winning the championship and for getting arrested.”

Myers also talks about the match Fischer played with the Argentinean Dan Beninson (1931 – 2003), which he won 3½-1½. “None of the games from this match are presently available but all are in the Targ Collection.”

Dr. Beninson was working for the UN at that time. Myers thinks that Beninson was a kind of trainer for Fischer. “It seemed to me that he showed more respect for the chess opinions of Beninson than for those of anyone else (except his own!). Besides that, Beninson always wore expensive suits; Fischer didn’t! His sartorial taste improved while associating with Beninson.”

In my youth I knew Dr. Beninson by sight in the Club Argentino in Buenos Aires. His specialism was atomic energy; in Argentina he had important posts in this field, he was the president of the Comisión Nacional de Energía Atómica (National Commission for Atomic Energy), among other responsibilities, and received many national and international awards.

He was a very strong blitz player, he really enjoyed playing and his role model was Capablanca. Had he devoted himself to chess he would have been very successful.

1958

Game 6

“A basic lesson in attacking the castled king”

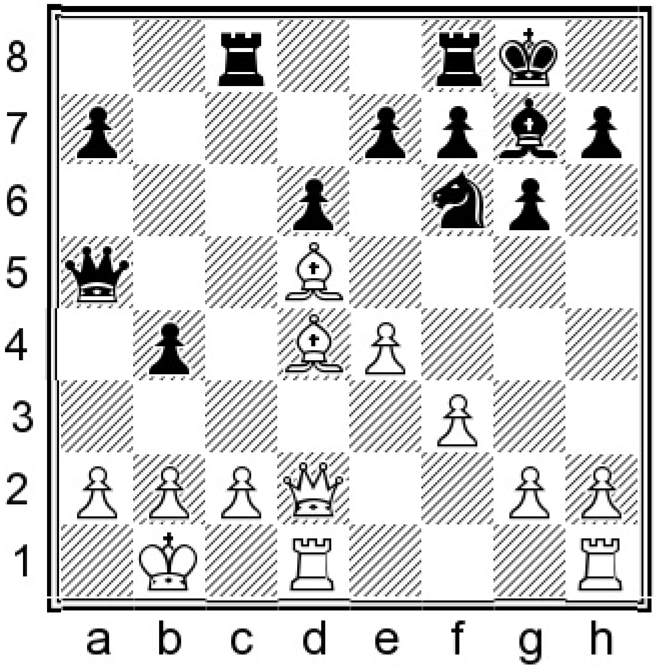
Larry Evans wrote about this game: “There is an aura of the inevitable about the outcome. Here the notes (by Fischer) are as instructive and lucid as the text, which is an object lesson in how to mount an attack against the fianchettoed king.”

Kasparov emphasised how efficient Fischer was against the Dragon Variation, “a devastating score of +13 –1 (not to mention dozens of blitz games).”

However, Kasparov commented that he did not so much win thanks to spectacular ideas in the opening as because he had a splendid understanding of the dynamic factors in the resulting positions. He added that in the middlegame many of his opponents seemed like mere novices.

Robert Fischer
Bent Larsen
Sicilian Defence [B77]
Portoroz Interzonal (8), 16.08.1958

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6 6.♗e3 ♗g7 7.f3 0-0 8.♕d2 ♘c6 9.♗c4 ♘xd4 10.♗xd4 ♗e6 11.♗b3 ♕a5 12.0-0-0 b5 13.♔b1 b4 14.♘d5 ♗xd5 15.♗xd5 ♖ac8



White to move

We are in a typical Yugoslav Attack position against the Dragon Variation. With the kings castled on opposite wings, it is possible that the game will be decided by an attacking race, in which a single tempo can tip the balance for one side or the other.

Exercise: How did Fischer begin his attack?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16.♗b3!

Preserving this strong bishop, which is vital to the white attack.

Question: But doesn’t this lose time?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: That’s not clear, as the bishop defends c2, which will be important if Black, as in the game, doubles rooks on the c-file.

Nevertheless, here the most important thing is to preserve the bishop. Fischer calculated enough to be confident that his attack would strike first and he was even convinced that at this point the game was practically won.

Question: Really? That’s an exaggeration isn’t it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes, perhaps objectively that was an exaggeration, but it is less surprising when we consider that in practice Fischer nearly always won this type of position.

White stands better, although, logically, it is still necessary to play precisely.

16...♖c7

This move is necessary for the plan of ...a5–a4. The immediate 16...♕b5 is bad, due to 17.♗xa7, and after 17...♘d7 18.♗d4 there is no compensation for the pawn.

Exercise (simple): What did Fischer play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17.h4

Of course; it is necessary to open lines against the enemy castled position. Fischer wrote that his winning recipe was simple: open the h-file and then “sac, sac... mate!”.

17...♕b5

Larsen continues with his idea of counterattack by advancing the a-pawn.

Question: Isn’t it better to prevent White’s idea of opening the h-file by playing ...h5?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Against this Fischer also had a standard response.

Exercise (simple): How would you reply to 17...h5?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: White would not hesitate to open lines quickly with 18.g4!, as Fischer indicated almost fifty years ago in "My 60 Memorable Games" and this remains convincing; let's look at main lines:

If 18...hxg4 then White plays 19.h5! gxh5 (if 19...♘xh5 then either 20.fxg4 or 20.♗xg7) 20.fxg4 ♘xe4 21.♕e3 ♘f6 (if 21...♗xd4 the quickest is 22.♖xd4) 22.gxh5 e5 23.h6, and wins.

White also strikes very quickly in the event of 18...♖fc8 19.♖dg1 hxg4 20.h5! gxh5 21.fxg4 ♘xe4 22.♕f4 e5 23.♕xe4 exd4, and here White can win with, for instance, 24.gxh5 ♔h8 25.h6 ♗f6 26.♖g7!, with mate in nine moves, according to the engines.

In both cases White opens the g- and h- files, regardless of the sacrifices required, and Black is powerless against the onslaught of the remaining white forces.

Exercise (simple): How to continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18.h5!

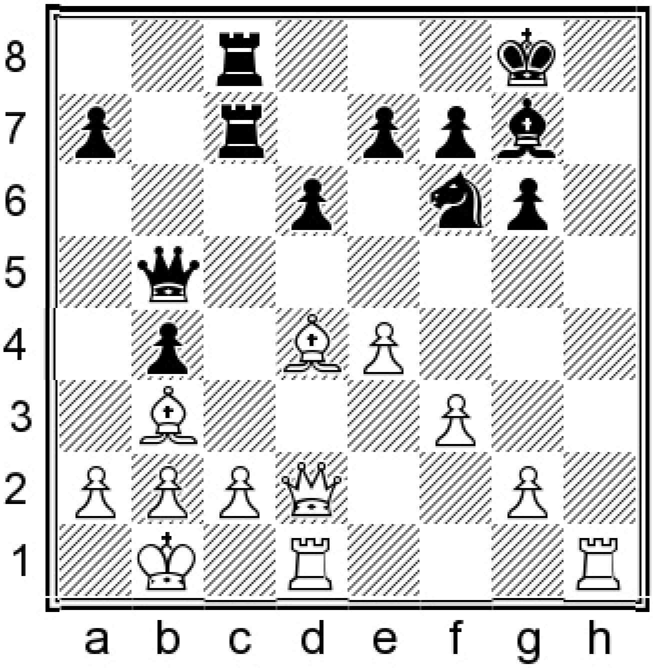
Of course, "There's no need to lose a tempo with the old-fashioned g4." (Fischer).

18...♖fc8

After 18...gxh5 the engines suggest various good alternatives, but the most 'human' continuation is the one suggested by Fischer. The priority is to open the kingside at all costs, in similar fashion to what we have already seen: 19.g4! hxg4 20.fxg4 ♘xe4 21.♕h2 ♘g5 22.♗xg7 ♔xg7 23.♖d5, soon forcing mate.

In the event of 18...♘xh5 19.♗xg7 ♔xg7 20.g4 ♘f6 21.♕h6+ ♔g8 the bishop on b3 displays its devastating power after 22.g5 ♘h5 23.♖xh5 gxh5 24.g6.

19.hxg6 hxg6



Exercise: How to continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20.g4!

No doubt the most natural reply, as Fischer indicated. The position is not yet ripe for drastic measures such as “the impatient” 20.♗xf6?

Exercise: After 20...♗xf6 21.♕h6, how can Black bring White’s offensive to a halt?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: With 21...e6!, nullifying the bishop on b3, and Black solves all his problems. Black threatens 22...♕e5 and if 22.f4 he can play either 22...♕e2! (Kasparov) or 22...♗g7 23.♕h7+ ♔f8 24.♖xd6, and now Black can counterattack with 24...a5 or 24...♖d7, when the g7-bishop is much more powerful than its counterpart on b3.

Nevertheless, the engines suggest some other interesting ideas, including 20.♖de1!, with the idea of e4-e5, and the exchange sacrifice 20.♖h6 (although it is debatable whether eliminating the strong defensive bishop is really a sacrifice in this position; the threat is 21.♖xg6 and 21.♖dh1 is also on the agenda) e.g. 20...♗xh6 21.♕xh6 ♕h5 22.♕c1 g5 23.♖h1 ♕g6 24.♕d2 a5 25.g4, White has more than enough compensation for the exchange.

These alternatives are of interest when, some moves later, it is apparent that Black's natural reply is not the best, but how to know that at this point?

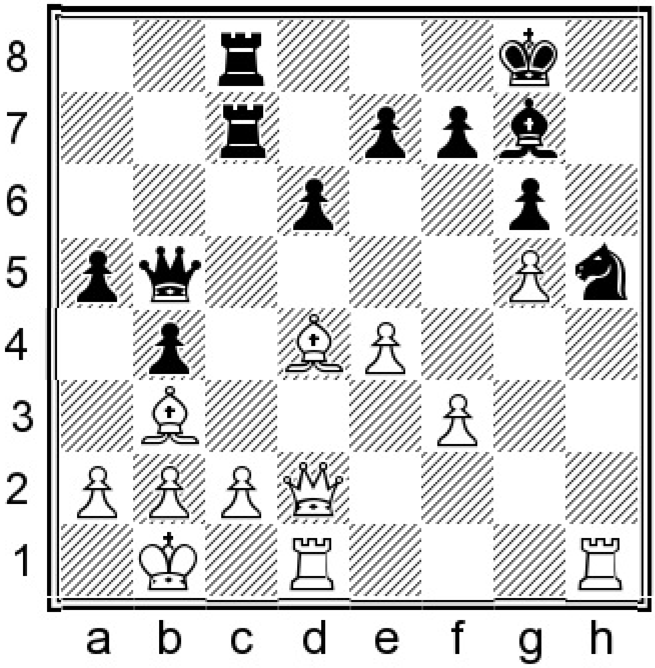
20...a5

The game enters its critical phase. Fischer considered that White had won the race and that the struggle was already decided in his favour.

21.g5 ♘h5

Closing the h-file. In response to Vasiukov's suggestion of 21...♘e8, Fischer indicated the sequence 22.♗xg7 ♘xg7 (22...♔xg7 23.♕h2 is quicker) 23.♖h6! e6 (if 23...a4 24.♕h2 ♘h5 25.♖xg6+ etc.) 24.♕h2 ♘h5 25.♗xe6! fxe6 (if 25...♕xg5 then 26.♖xg6+! ♕xg6 and now 27.♗xc8 or 27.♖g1) 26.♖xg6+ ♘g7 27.♖h1, with a quick mate.

21...a4 is no better, according to Fischer, due to 22.gxf6 axb3 and now 23.fxg7! bxc2+ 24.♕xc2! e5 25.♕h2 wins.



Exercise: What does Fischer's 'recipe' indicate here?

Show/Hide Solution

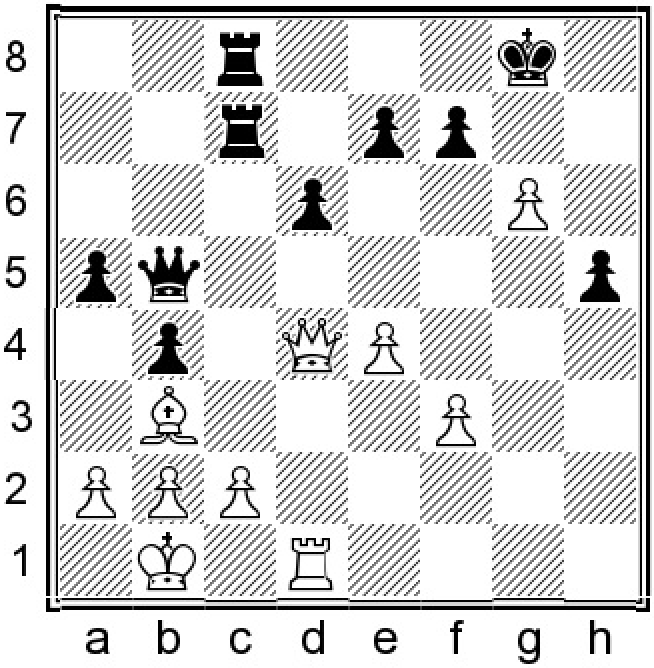
Answer:

22.♖xh5!

Here Fischer recalled Reuben Fine’s comment: “in such positions, combinations are as natural as a baby’s smile”. This is the strongest move, everything seems to indicate that the bishop on b3 is destined to play a decisive role. This is what was believed for many years, but in fact it isn’t so simple.

22...gxh5

Here 22...♗xd4 was an option, when Fischer gave 23.♕xd4 gxh5 24.g6.



Now 24...e6 loses to 25.gxf7+ ♔xf7 26.♕xd6, when Fischer indicated that the defensive try 24...♕e5? is refuted by 25.gxf7+ ♔h7 (after 25...♔f8 the strongest of several winning lines is 26.♕g1 ♕g7 27.♗e6) and now “26.♕d3, intending f4, should be decisive.”

It is easy to agree with this; the pawn on f7 and the weakness of the black king are decisive factors.

However, in the position of the last diagram, Black has a satisfactory defence available.

Exercise (difficult): How can Black defend after 24.g6?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Black has the elegant interference move 24...♖c4!!; in retrospect this is very logical, since “the bishop must be neutralized at any price!” (Kasparov).

Here are a few of the main lines indicated by Kasparov:

a) 25.gxf7+ ♔xf7 26.e5! a4! 27.♕f4+ ♔e8 28.♗xc4 ♕xc4! 29.♕f5 ♖c5! 30.♕xh5+ ♔d8 31.♕f5 ♕e2! 32.♖g1 ♖xe5, “with equality (weakness of the back rank!)”;

b) 25.♕g1 a4!;

c) 25.♕e3 fxg6 26.♕h6 ♔f7 27.f4! ♔e8! 28.♕xg6+ ♔d8 29.♗xc4, and now as well as 29...♕xc4 30.e5 ♕e2 31.♖c1 dxe5 32.♕e6 there is the even simpler 29...♖xc4, and if 30.e5 ♖xf4 31.exd6, then 31...♖f1!, and there is nothing more than a draw.

Question: So, even Fischer's legendary book contains errors then?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes. Following the appearance of such strong analysis engines, we mere mortals have been able to discover flaws even in good analysis made in the past, not by hours of exhaustive analysis, but almost always just by a glance at the computer screen.

But we should take little pride in our 'discoveries' in complex positions, because in a few years time these are also likely to be overturned by even stronger engines and computers.

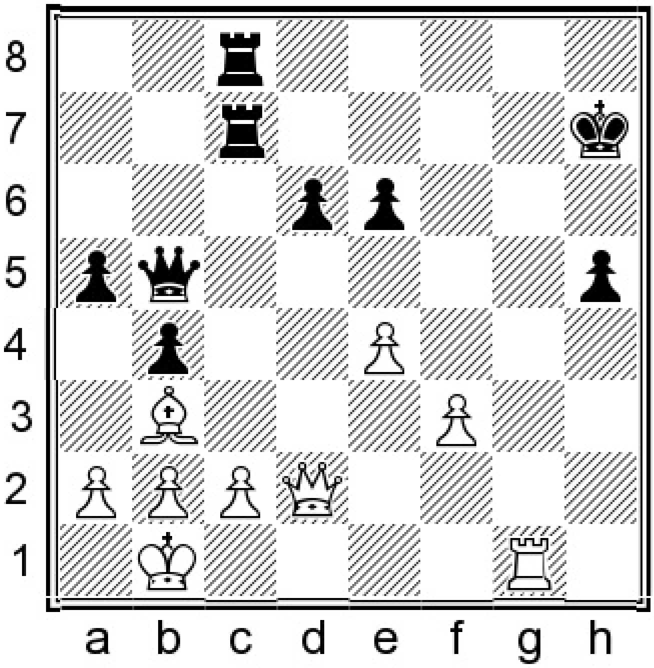
Kasparov said that this resource (24...♖c4!!) cast doubt on Fischer's idea. Yet this might not be the case; the move 23.♕xd4 is not forced and it is possible for White to maintain the pressure with 23.♖h6 (threatening 24.♖xg6+) 23...♗g7 24.♕f4 (this exchange sacrifice no longer comes as a surprise), when 24...♗xh6?! 25.♕xf7+ ♔h8 26.f4! (better than 26.gxh6 ♕e5 27.♕xg6 ♕f6) 26...♕e8 27.♕e6, threatening 28.♖h1, gives White a crushing attack.

24...e5 is better, after which White can keep the initiative in the complications arising from 25.♕h4 a4 26.♖xg6 axb3 27.♖xg7+ ♔f8 (27...♔xg7 loses to 28.♕h6+ ♔g8 29.♖h1) 28.♖h1, and in this complex position the engines prefer White's chances.

23.g6 e5

Kasparov wrote that "it was worth trying the more tenacious 23...e6". Then after 24.gxf7+ ♖xf7 Whit wins easily with 25.♗xg7 (stronger than the equally winning 25.♗xe6) 25...♔xg7 26.♖g1+ ♔h7 27.♕g2.

Instead, after 24...♔xf7 25.♗xg7 ♔xg7 26.♖g1+ ♔h7 we reach an interesting situation.



Fischer was right in saying that he could win with 27.♕g2 ♕e5 28.♕g6+ ♔h8 and now 29.♗xe6! is decisive, e.g. 29...♖b8 30.♗f7! and White wins.

But Kasparov considered that after 27.♕g2 Black could defend effectively with 27...♕e8.

Exercise (difficult): Can you demonstrate that 27...♕e8 doesn't solve all Black's problems?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: White (once again!) needs to incorporate the inactive bishop into the attack with 28.e5! and after 28...d5 29.c4! (intending ♗c2), when 29...dxc4 loses to 30.♗c2+ ♔h8 31.♕g5, while 29...♔h8 is answered with 30.♗c2 ♖f7 31.cxd5! exd5 32.♗f5! ♖d8 33.e6 ♖c7 34.♕g5, and a quick mate.

Kasparov notes that in the diagram position White can also win with 27.♗xe6! and after 27...♖f8 the most precise seems to be 28.♕g2!, (even better than the moves given by Kasparov, 28.♕xd6 and 28.♗d5), e.g. 28...♕e8 29.♗f5+ ♖xf5 30.exf5 ♕f7 31.♕h3, followed by 32.♖g6 or 32.♖g5.

24.gxf7+ ♔f8

Returning the exchange fails to save Black, which comes as no surprise; after 24...♖xf7 25.♗e3 a4 26.♗e6, followed by 27.♖h1 or 27.♕xd6, White wins easily.

25.♗e3 d5

"A desperate bid for freedom." (Fischer).

Exercise (simple): How was Fischer intending to reply to 25...a4?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: With the crushing 26.♕xd6+ ♖e7 27.♕d8+! ♖xd8 28.♖xd8+ ♖e8 29.♗c5+, and mate.

26.exd5 ♖xf7

If 26...a4 then 27.d6! wins, making room for the bishop if the rook retreats, while if 27...axb3 28.dxc7 wins.

27.d6 ♖f6

If 27...♖d7 then 28.♗e6 is good enough, but 28.♗h6! is even more crushing.

After 27...♖xf3 28.d7 White threatens ♕d6+.

28.♗g5 ♕b7

In the event of 28...♕d7, blocking the d-pawn, the quickest way is 29.♗xf6 ♗xf6 30.♖g1 ♗g7 31.♕d5, with a quick mate.

29.♗xf6 ♗xf6 30.d7

30.♖g1 also works, but then the mate takes two moves longer.

30...♖d8 31.♕d6+

As Fischer indicated, 31.♕h6+! is quicker, but by now it doesn’t matter.

1–0

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1959

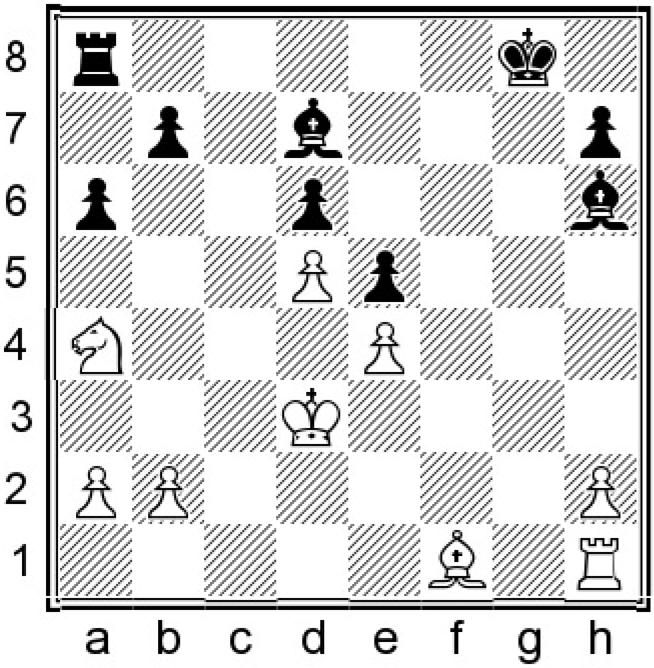
Game 7

Attacking with few pieces

Fischer had some problems in the early stage of this game, in which he employed his favourite King's Indian Defence. He gained the bishop pair, but this was of no immediate advantage. However, after a few inaccuracies by his opponent, the bishops were transformed into a formidable weapon. The final attack, with so few pieces, is very unusual.

João Souza Mendes
Robert Fischer
King's Indian Defence [E81]
Mar del Plata (4), 26.03.1959

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.f3 e5 6.♘ge2 0-0 7.♗g5 c6 8.♕d2 ♕a5 9.d5 cxd5 10.♘xd5 ♕xd2+ 11.♔xd2 ♘xd5 12.cxd5 f6 13.♗e3 ♘d7 14.♘c3 a6 15.g4 f5 16.gxf5 gxf5 17.♗d3 fxe4 18.fxe4 ♘f6 19.♘a4 ♘g4 20.♖af1 ♖xf1 21.♗xf1 ♘xe3 22.♔xe3 ♗h6+ 23.♔d3 ♗d7



White to move

Black has the pair of bishops, but if White plays well this will not be a problem and he will be left with the advantage.

24.♖g1+?!

> **Question:** How can this possibly be dubious? It gains a tempo by bringing his rook into play with check. What could be wrong with that?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: As always, general considerations are subordinate to tactical ones. It is not enough for a move to look good, it needs to be verified tactically, and as we shall see, on g1 the rook is exposed to attacks by the dark-squared bishop.

It was best to play the immediate 24.♘b6!, when White has the advantage, e.g. 24...♗b5+ 25.♔c3 ♖d8 26.♗xb5 ♗e3 27.♘c4 ♗d4+ 28.♔b4, and wins a pawn, or 24...♖d8 25.♖g1+! ♔f7 26.a4!, preventing the check on b5, with the idea of invading the black position with 27.♖g2 and ♖c2.

24...♔h8 25.♘c3?

After this passive retreat Black already stands better, his two bishops are beginning to count.

The position would be even after 25.♘b6 ♗b5+ 26.♔c3, but there would still be play.

Now, rather than 26...♖d8 27.♗xb5 ♗e3! (thanks to 24.♖g1) 28.♖g3 ♗xb6 29.♗e2, it would be more ambitious to play 26...♖f8 27.♗xb5 axb5 (if 27...♗e3 then 28.♖f1) 28.♖g3 ♖f2.

> **Exercise:** How did Fischer continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

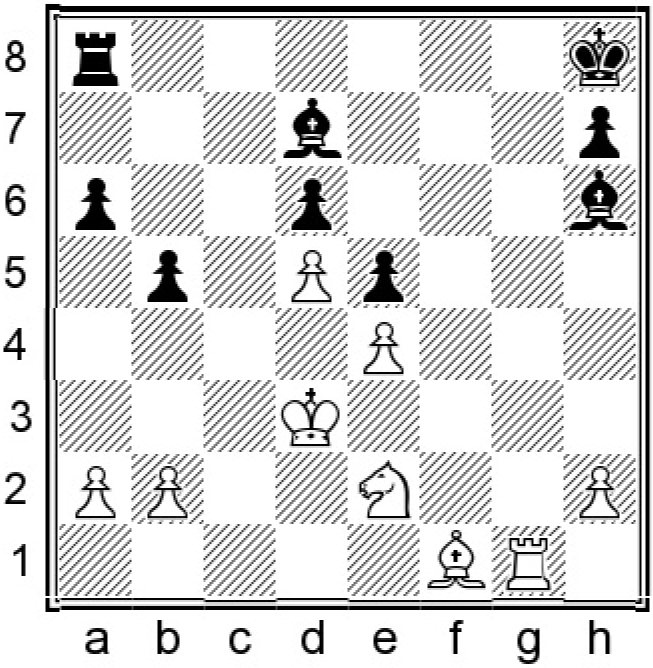
25...b5!

Fischer starts to gain space, favouring the power of his bishops.

Another attractive idea was to activate the rook with 25...♖f8 26.♗e2 ♖f4, intending 27...♖h4, but Fischer doesn't want to commit the rook just yet, since there are other possible squares for it.

26.♘e2

If 26.b4 then 26...♖f8 would follow.



Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

26...b4!

Threatening to win with 27...♖c8, because there would be no good defence against 28...♗b5+.

27.♔c2 ♖c8+ 28.♔b3

28.♔b1 was a sad alternative, leaving Black in clear command. A possible continuation then would be 28...♗b5, suggested by Matanovic, e.g. 29.♗h3 ♗d3+ 30.♔a1 ♖c2 31.♗e6, and here, not 31...♗g7?, due to 32.♘g3, but the elegant solution 31...♗g5!, and after 32.♖xg5 h6 Black regains the piece with mating threats and with the pawns on e4 and h2 about to fall.

It was also worth considering leaving the bishop on d7 and first playing 28...♗d2, leaving the h7-pawn free to move and threatening to play 29.-- 29...♗b5 under better conditions, as White would no longer have the resource 30.♗h3 ♗d3+ 31.♔a1 ♖c2 32.♗e6 h5 33.♘g3 due to 33...♗c1.

28...a5 29.♖g3?!

White's position is already difficult; in the event of 29.a4 (preventing 29...♗b5) 29...bxa3 30.♔xa3 ♖f8, Black's advantage is beyond dispute.

29...♖f8

The rook seeks to invade the white camp, but it was already well placed on c8; it was stronger to play the immediate 29...♗b5! and after 30.♗h3 ♖c4 (threatening mate) 31.a4 ♗a6 32.♗e6 ♗g7 33.♖e3 (33.♘g1 ♖xe4) 33...♖c7 34.♔a2 ♖c2 35.♘g3 ♗h6, Black infiltrates decisively.

30.♗h3 ♗b5 31.♘g1?!

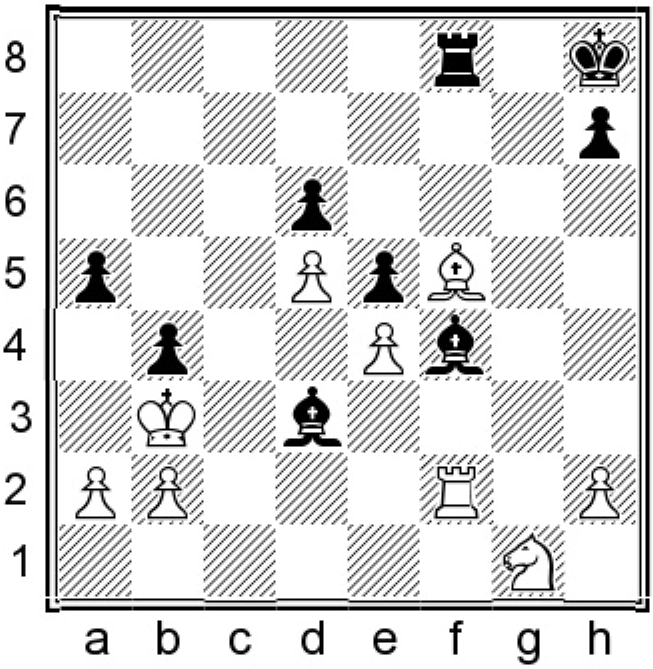
This allows Black to keep advancing; 31.♗g4! was more tenacious.

31...♗f4 32.♖g2 ♗f1

An intermediate move; before moving the bishop to d3, Fischer considers that the white rook is situated worse on f2 than g2.

This is a good move but 32...♗e3!, was also effective (threatening to win material with 33...♗f1 34.♖g3 ♗xg1) 33.♘e2 h5! 34.♗f5 h4, and White is paralysed; a possible plan now would be 35...♖f7, intending ...♖c7.

33.♖f2 ♗d3 34.♗f5



Exercise: How did Fischer's idea continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

34...♖b8!

With a mating attack; the three black pieces will work together. In contrast, the white king is very lonely; 34...♗e3 was also strong, with similar ideas to the game continuation.

35.♘h3

If 35.♖g2 then 35...♗e3!, with an ending similar to what we shall see.

Exercise: How did Fischer finish off the game?

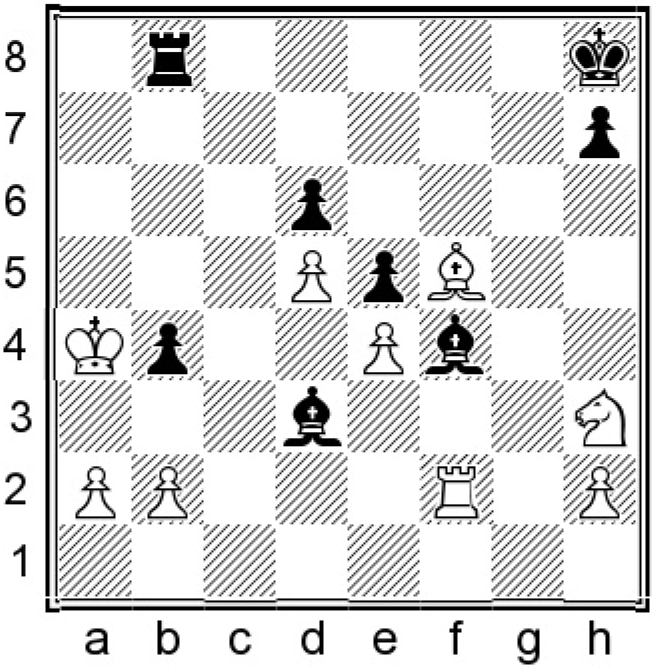
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

35...a4+!

The first step in the incarceration of the white monarch.

36.♔xa4



Exercise (simple): What is the second step?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

36...b3!

The white king is trapped in a mating net, in which his own pawns betray him.

37.axb3

In the event of 37.a3 Black would slowly bring his two bishops closer, to create the cage with 37...♗e3, e.g. 38.♖g2 ♗b5+ 39.♔a5 ♗f1 40.♖g3 ♗c5.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

37...♗e3

Of course, the bishop joins in the attack with gain of time, making good use of 32...♗f1.

Question: Did Fischer really calculate so far?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: It is impossible to say with any certainty; the most plausible answer is that before playing 32...♗f1 Fischer evaluated that 'at some point' it might be useful that the rook would be vulnerable to attack by the bishop, without having any specific line in mind, just thinking in general terms.

38.♖f3

This allows mate in two moves, but by now there was no defence. If 38.♗d7 Black wins with 38...♗xf2 39.♘xf2 ♗c2, but Black could also continue his attack with 38...♗c5, seeking to mate with the rook, e.g. 39.♗c6 ♖b6 40.♖f8+ ♔g7 41.♖a8 ♔h6 and White is defenceless.

38...♖a8+

Mate with 39.♔b4 ♗d2++ would follow.

0–1

Game 8

Attacking with the support of the light-squared bishop

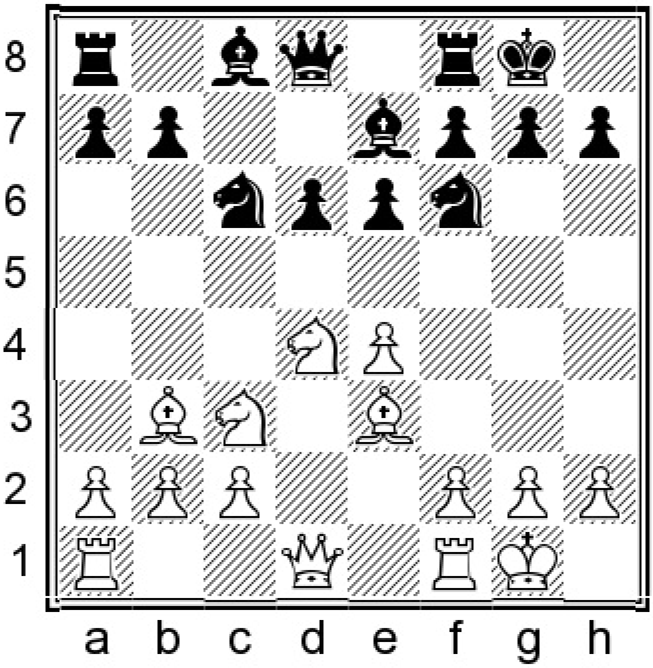
Fischer played his favourite Sozin Attack. It took only one weak move by Black for White to bring to life Fischer's favourite bishop, the light-squared one, and to start a strong attack, which was not very common in Fischer's games. The attack ended with an attractive and unusual sacrifice of material.

Robert Fischer
Herman Pilnik
Sicilian Defence [B88]
Memorial A. Palma, Santiago de Chile (12), 05.1959

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♗c4 e6 7.♗b3 ♗e7 8.0-0

This was Fischer's pet line. He also used the Velimirovic Attack, based on queenside castling, prepared by 8.♗e3 followed by 9.♕e2, but with less success. Kasparov commented that in this position kingside castling was more in Fischer's style.

8...0-0 9.♗e3



9...♗d7

Fischer faced this idea several times; Black's main plan here is ...♘xd4, followed by ...♗c6 and ...b5.

Korchnoi gained a good position in Rovinj-Zagreb 1970 by playing the immediate 9...♘xd4 10.♗xd4 b5, with the idea of answering 11.♘xb5 with 11...♗a6, revealing the point of keeping the bishop on c8.

For his part, Spassky preferred 9...a6 in the fourth game of their match in Reykjavík 1972. He was able to speed up his queenside offensive and gained the advantage.

10.f4 ♘xd4

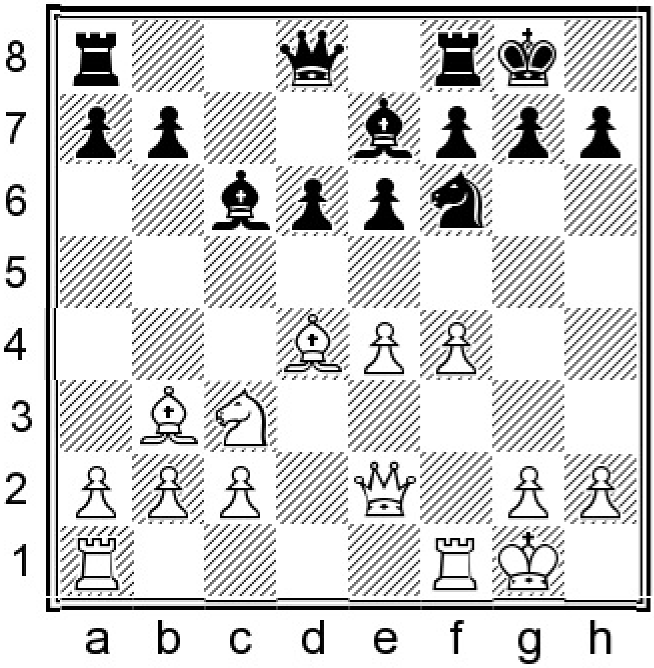
In the third game of their match in Denver 1971, Larsen played the less consistent 10...a6 and after 11.f5! ♕c8? 12.fxe6 ♗xe6? 13.♘xe6 fxe6 14.♘a4 ♖b8 15.♘b6 he lost the e6-pawn and was already in an almost hopeless position.

In the fifth game of the match, Larsen improved his idea by playing 10...♕c8 immediately. Fischer still played 11.f5, sacrificing the pawn; Larsen's position was OK but he still ended up losing; remember that the match ended 6 – 0.

11.♗xd4 ♗c6

Here 11...b5?! is bad due to 12.e5 and Black has to play the sad 12...♘e8.

12.♕e2



12...♕a5?

Question: What? How can a developing move be bad?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: This is indeed a natural developing move, but we shall soon see that it is passive.

It was necessary to strike back here with the familiar resource 12...b5!, which Fischer faced on several occasions.

If 13.a3 then 13...a5, so the main line is 13.♘xb5. In Fischer - Nievergelt, Zurich 1959, the game continued 13...e5 14.fxe5 dxe5 15.♗e3 a6? (here 15...♕d7, followed by 16...♘xe4, is better) 16.♘c3 ♘xe4 17.♖xf7! ♖xf7 18.♗xf7+ ♔h8, and now, instead of 19.♕c4? ♗g5!, it was better to play 19.♘xe4! ♗xe4 20.♗f2, or 20.♖d1 ♕c7 21.c4, with clear advantage to White.

More usual is 13...♗xb5 14.♕xb5 ♘xe4 15.f5 e5! 16.♗e3 ♗g5, and practice has shown that Black is fine.

In this last line Fischer didn't get much out of the opening when he faced the alternative 15...♗f6 16.♕d3 d5, drawing twice against Jim Warren in simultaneous games in 1964.

A more important game continued 17.♗xf6 ♘xf6 18.c4 dxc4 (also possible is 18...♕b6+ 19.♔h1 ♘e4, with balanced chances) 19.♕xd8 ♖fxd8 20.♗xc4 e5 21.♖fe1 e4 with an equal ending, but 1–0 in 58 moves, Fischer - Weinstein, US Championship. 1958/59, New York.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13.f5!

Of course, we know that this is one of the basic ideas of the lines with 6.♗c4, to open the diagonal a2-g8 in favour of White's light-squared bishop.

13...e5

Naturally it would be bad to open the f-file by playing 13...exf5 14.♖xf5, especially with the queen on a5.

14.♗f2 ♗d8

Pilnik is willing to sacrifice a pawn to exchange or activate his worst piece. He will achieve his objective, but that element will remain in the background.

This is one of the top choices of the engines in early 2021, together with 14...♕a6.

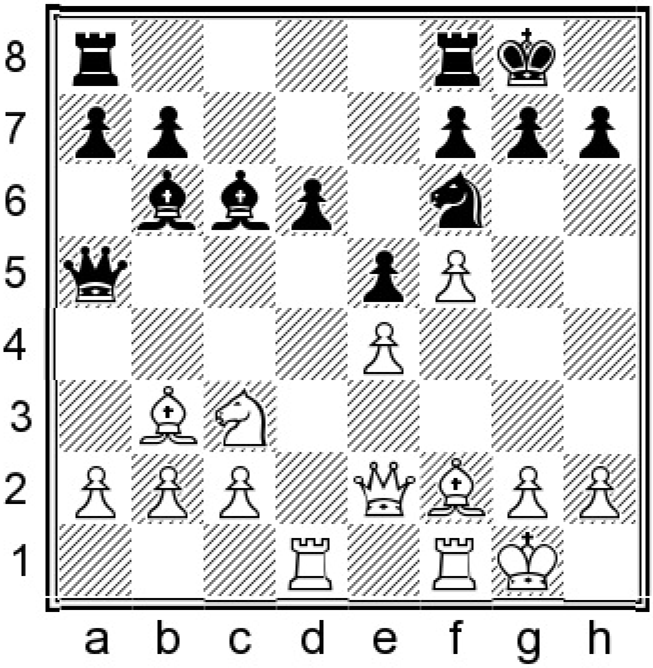
With the queen already on a5, 14...b5 isn't as strong, as White can just play 15.a3! and Black must lose another tempo with e.g. 15...♕c7 in order to play ...a5, which is very slow.

After the immediate 14...♕c7 White can play in similar fashion to the game.

15.♖ad1

Bringing the remaining inactive piece to the center; no yet the thematic 15.♗h4, because it leads to unclear complications after 15...♘xe4!.

15...♗b6



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16.g4!

Trying to demonstrate that, in reality, with the absence or exchange of the e7-bishop, Black has lost a defender.

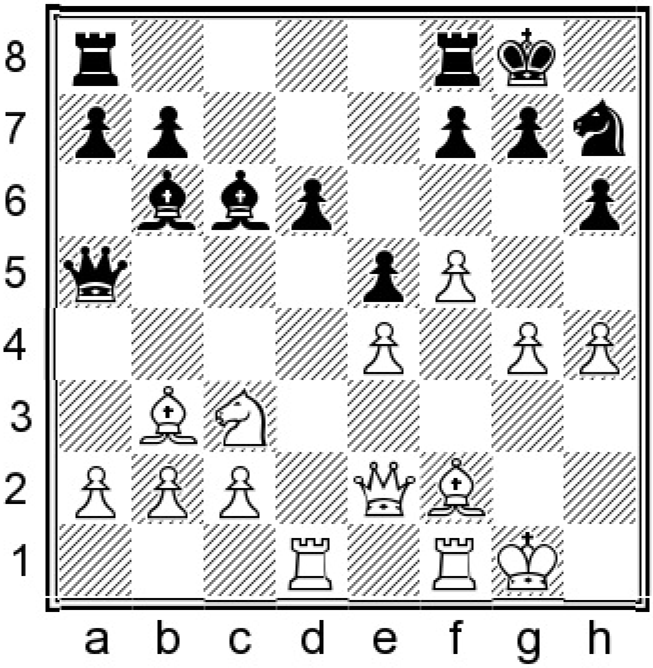
Black's idea works in the event of 16.♖xd6 ♗xf2+ 17.♖xf2 ♕c5 (if 17...♖ad8 then 18.♖xf6 gxf6 19.♖f3 is interesting) 18.♖d2 ♖ad8.

16...h6

The snags of holding up White's g5-advance in this manner are obvious: it creates a 'hook' on g5 and the bigger problem is that it's not even clear that g5 is prevented. However, it was already difficult for Black to defend his position with any guarantee of security.

White's attack is easy to carry out, e.g. if 16...♗xf2+ 17.♖xf2 ♕c5 18.g5 ♘d7 (or 18...♘e8) White would play 19.♕h5, with the plan of 20.♖d3-h3, with the advance g5-g6 also available.

17.h4 ♘h7



Black tries to prevent White’s main idea, which is to advance with g4-g5, but the d6-pawn remains unprotected.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18.♖d3!

The rook is heading for the kingside; Fischer makes it clear that he is not interested in the pawn and wants to attack. If he had not had this option, which is more attractive, he would possibly have played 18.♖xd6 ♗xf2+ 19.♖xf2 ♖ad8 20.♖d3.

Nevertheless, with the same idea of attack, 18.g5! hxg5?! 19.hxg5 ♘xg5 20.♕g4 was also to be considered, but Fischer prefers to carry out the g5-break under better conditions, with his pieces better placed.

There is no need to hurry. We might say that this is one of Fischer’s characteristics, crystal-clear play, avoiding premature or unnecessary complications.

18...♔h8

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue his attack?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19.g5

Here the absence of the bishop from e7 makes itself felt; its defensive role was not negligible. With White's major pieces active, opening lines would rarely be appropriate for Black and that's certainly the case here: after 19...hxg5? 20.hxg5 ♘xg5? 21.♕h5+ ♘h7 22.♖h3 there is mate in two moves.

19...♗d4

Black sharpens the struggle, to try to divert White from his attack; he is trying to prevent the white queen from joining in the attack with ♕h5, due to ...♗xc3 and ...♗xe4.

20.♔h2

Clearing the g-file.

White already has several attractive and good lines. In fact it was possible to play 20.♕h5!, as 20...♗xc3 21.♖xc3 ♗xe4 fails to 22.♗xf7, threatening 23.gxh6, while if 22...♗xf5? then 23.g6 wins.

The engines have no hesitation in sacrificing the exchange with 20.♖xd4! exd4 21.♗xd4, with an unstoppable attack. Fischer once again prefers something apparently simpler, but no less strong.

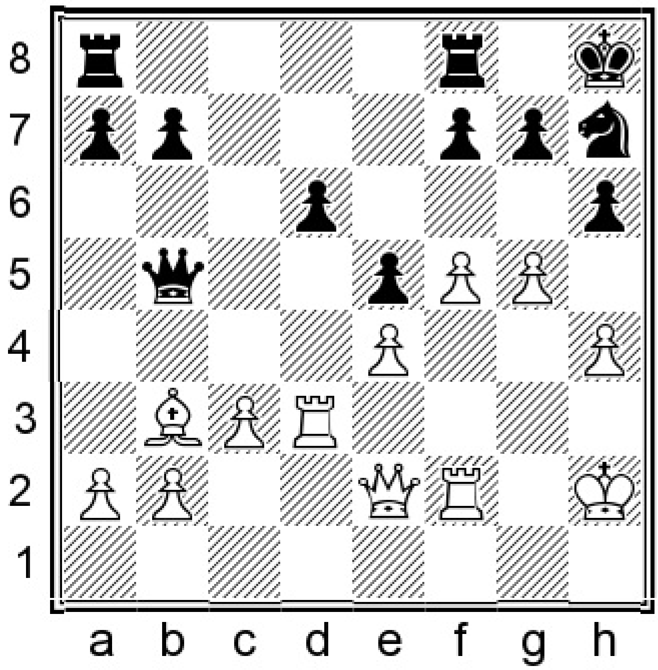
20...♗b5

Black no would not succeed in stopping the attack in the event of 20...♗xc3 21.bxc3 ♕c7 22.♖g3, planning 23.♖fg1, followed by gxh6, ♗e3, etc., although the move played is no better.

21.♘xb5 ♕xb5 22.c3

Fischer provokes the exchange of bishops, which further clarifies the position. Also effective were the alternatives 22.gxh6 gxh6 23.♕d2 and the ever-present 22.♕h5.

22...♗xf2 23.♖xf2



23...♕b6

In the event of 23...hxg5 24.hxg5 Black can’t play 24...♘xg5? due to 25.♕h5+ ♔g8 26.♕xg5 ♕xd3 27.♖g2, while if 24...g6 the quickest is 25.♔h1!, with the idea of 26.♖h2, e.g. 25...♘xg5 26.♖h2+ ♔g7 (or 26...♔g8 27.♖xd6, attacking the queen while also threatening 28.♖xg6++) 27.f6+! ♔g8 and now the simple 28.♖dh3 wins the queen, although the engines point out a mate with 28.♖h8+ ♔xh8 29.♕h2+ ♘h7 30.♕h6 ♖g8 31.♕xh7+!.

24.♖g2

Freeing the queen from the defence of the rook, with the idea of 25.♕h5.

24...d5

A pawn sacrifice to defend h6 with the queen, but the attack continues unabated.

25.♗xd5 ♖ad8 26.♕h5

The threats are now 27.f6 or simply 27.♖dg3.

26...g6 27.♕xh6

Planning, among other things, 27...-- 28.f6 ♖g8 29.♗xf7 ♖xd3 30.♗xg8, and wins.

27...♖xd5

Question: More sacrifices? Do they offer any chances of salvation?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: No, not really, but the alternative was to resign.

28.exd5 e4

After 28...gxf5 can win either by exchanging queens or continuing with the attack by playing 29.d6 or 29.g6.

29.♖dg3 ♕d6

Exercise (simple): It's clear that White is winning, but, what is the quickest way now?

Show/Hide Solution

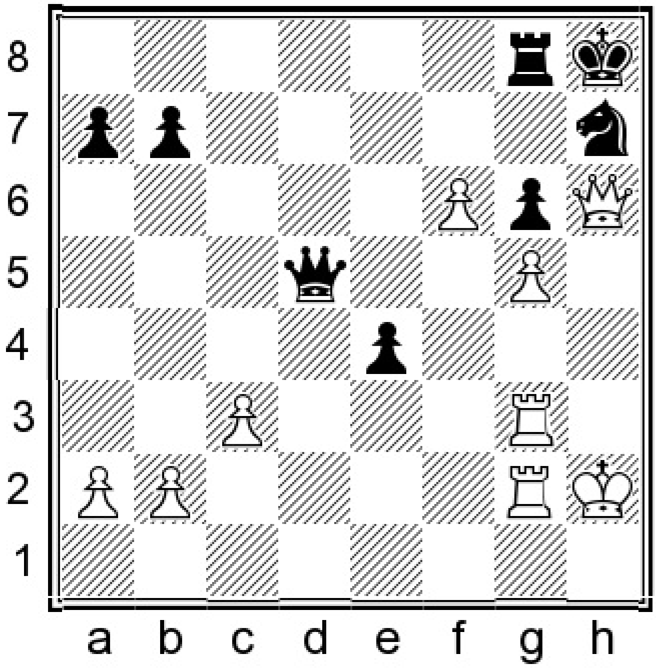
Answer:

30.h5!

Of course; by continuing to open lines against the black monarch.

30...♖g8 31.hxg6 fxg6 32.f6 ♕xd5

This loses immediately, but by now there was no defence; if 32...e3 White can unpin with 33.♔g1, while after 32...♕c7 the quickest is 33.♔h1.



Exercise (simple): How did Fischer conclude his attack?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

33.♕xh7+!

1–0

Game 9

“A brilliant example of Bobby’s fine technique”

All World Champions have excelled in their handling of the Ruy Lopez, or Spanish Opening. It is an opening which can lead to many different structures and it is said that learning it helps a player to understand other systems and to play them better.

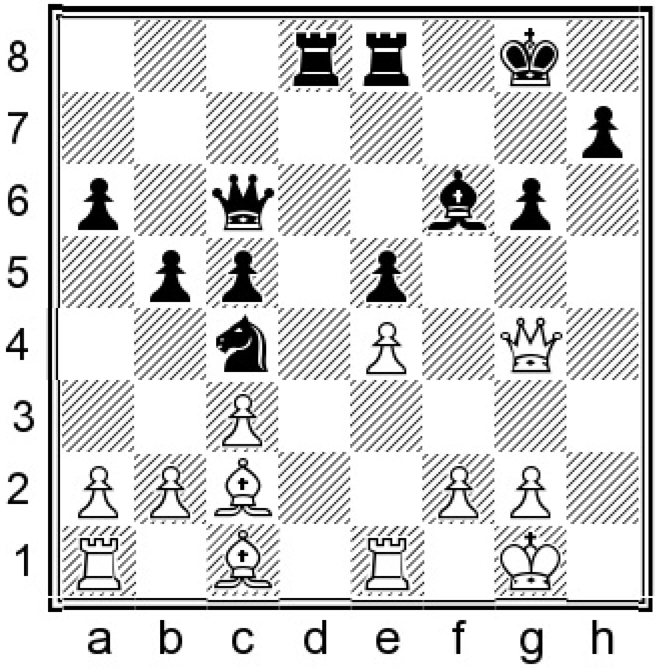
Fischer was no exception. This game is an example of a statement by Bronstein, who used a metaphor to express the idea that you have to play it by accumulating small advantages.

At the start there is almost nothing in it, but later in the game, where “his competitive qualities are vividly demonstrated,” as Kasparov pointed out, Fischer manoeuvres to perfection, “creating simultaneous threats on both wings, Fischer finally infiltrates on the a-file. Black is so tied up that he cannot defend one of his pawns when attacked – making defeat imminent,” as Larry Evans described it.

“A brilliant example of Bobby’s fine technique, especially taking account of his young age,” was how Kasparov summed it up; Fischer had had his sixteenth birthday only two months previously.

Robert Fischer
Wolfgang Unzicker
Ruy Lopez [C97]
Zurich (8), 28.05.1959

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♘a5 10.♗c2 c5 11.d4 ♕c7 12.♘bd2 ♗d7 13.♘f1 ♖fe8 14.♘e3 g6 15.dxe5 dxe5 16.♘h2 ♖ad8 17.♕f3 ♗e6 18.♘hg4 ♘xg4 19.hxg4 ♕c6 20.g5 ♘c4 21.♘g4 ♗xg4 22.♕xg4 f6 23.gxf6 ♗xf6



White to play

The opening has left White with a slight advantage. The bishop pair allows him to be optimistic in the long term; his pawn structure is better, with two “pawn islands” against Black’s three, but as Bronstein and Kasparov indicated, it is only possible to increase the slight advantage after lengthy manoeuvres.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24.a4!

A typical move in the Ruy Lopez, White opens a second front and is able to develop his a1-rook in the best possible way, on the file where it stands already.

24...♘b6 25.axb5 axb5 26.♗e3

Fischer was already very pleased with his position, as with activity on both wings “White, with his two bishops, is better able to penetrate and exploit the ‘loose’ pawns.”

Kasparov commented that Black could still offer tenacious resistance and considered that Fischer was overestimating his position.

26...♖a8

Fischer commented that 26...♘c4 would be answered with 27.♗b3, “instituting an awkward pin,” whereas Hübner thought that after 27...♔h8 28.♗xc4 bxc4 Black could defend.

Question: Isn’t that a rather optimistic view? It seems to me that Black has numerous weaknesses in his structure, passive pieces are the worse-paced king.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes, this view of the black position does appear to be too optimistic, but it’s quite typical of the modern way of evaluating a position; all those advantages are considered insufficient unless there is some concrete way of exploiting them.

In 2021 the engines are not quite so optimistic about Black’s chances.

Hübner’s valuable analyses were published in 2004. Kasparov, writing later in the same year, considered them worthy of mention, but his appraisal did not always agree with Hübner’s. In the continuation of the line quoted above, Kasparov found an improvement for White: after 29.♖a5 ♗e7 30.♖a7 ♖a8 31.♖ea1 ♖xa7 32.♖xa7 ♗f8 33.♕h4 ♗g7, Kasparov pointed out 34.f3!, e.g. 34...♔g8 35.♗h6 ♗f6 36.♗g5 ♗g7 37.♕f2, “with appreciable pressure.” The current engines agree with Kasparov.

27.♖ed1

Question: Well, White still doesn’t seem to have much here, does he?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Don’t be so impatient; remember that this is long-distance race; Fischer’s optimism is evident in his note: “If he swaps, White gains the rook’s file; if he doesn’t, White keeps the queen’s file.”

27...♔h8

Hübner criticised this move, on the grounds that the king is worse on h8 than on g8, both in the middlegame, because then the king is more vulnerable if the white bishop moves to h6, and in the endgame, because centralising the king will cost an extra tempo.

Hübner suggested simplifying with 27...♖xa1 28.♖xa1 ♖a8, and after 29.♖xa8+ ♘xa8 he considered that Black would have relieved the pressure and obtained an acceptable position.

Kasparov once again is closer to Fischer in his evaluation that “after 30.b3 he would have faced a lengthy and gruelling defence.”

Exercise: What did Fischer play now to improve his position slightly?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

28.b3

This keeps the knight out of c4, and a later ...c4 can be answered satisfactorily with b4.

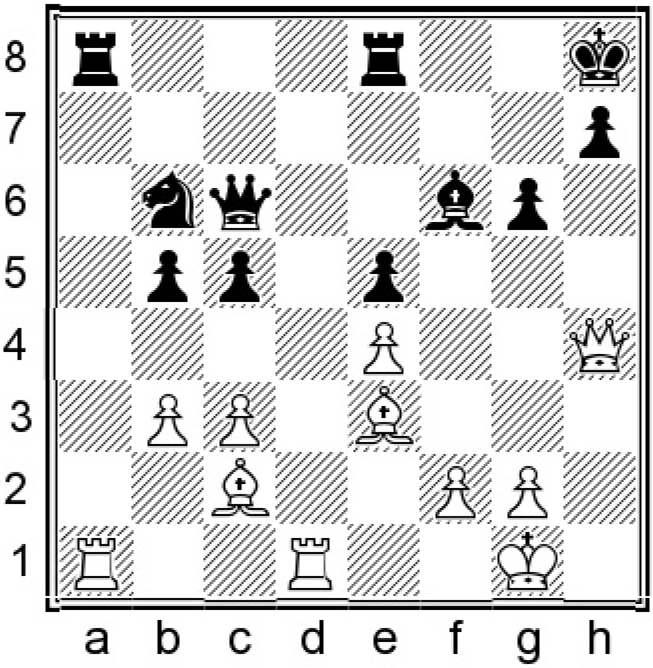
28...♗g7

Fischer thought that Black should reduce the pressure by playing 28...♖xa1 29.♖xa1 ♖a8 30.♖xa8+ ♘xa8, although he indicated that after 31.♕d1!, with the idea of ♕a1, his queen would be able to penetrate the queenside, with advantage.

Nevertheless, Kasparov commented that after 31...♘c7, instead of 32.♕a1, it was even stronger to increase the pressure on the black pawns by improving his inactive bishop with 32.♗d3! ♔g7 33.♗f1!, when “Black has chronic problems.”

The engines of 2021 are in agreement with Kasparov and with Fischer’s evaluation quoted earlier: his two bishops give him the advantage.

29.♕h4 ♗f6



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

30.♗g5!

Question: Really? Can it be good for White to exchange Black’s bad bishop? The white bishop seems a much better piece.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: “It’s not the pieces that leave the board that are important, but the ones that remain,” as we saw, and as we shall see, there are many examples in Fischer’s games that confirm Tarrasch’s phrase.

Kasparov considered that this move was an example of “a concrete approach to the position that is typical of Fischer: he exchanges his ‘good’ bishop for the opponent’s ‘bad’ bishop, in order to weaken still further the e5-pawn and the defences of the black king.”

Anand made a similar counter-intuitive decision to exchange the dark-squared bishops in his game against Carlsen from Morelia/Linares 1997, which I analysed in my book Anand - Move by Move.

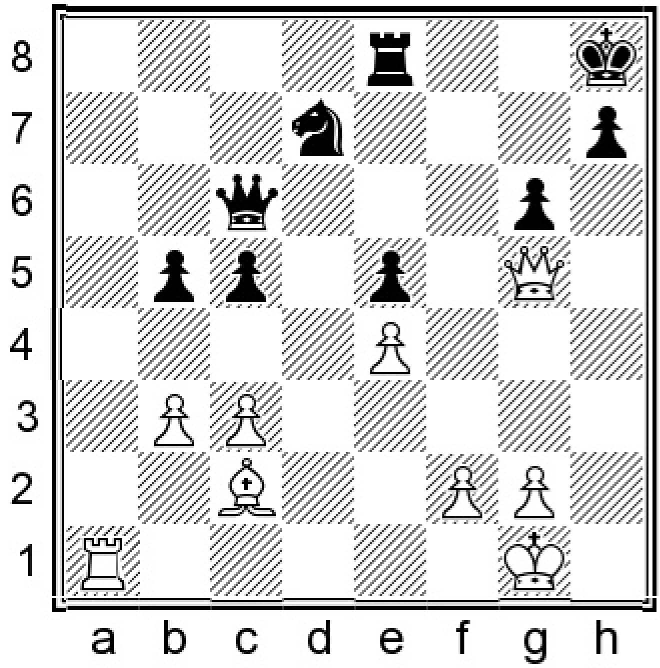
30...♗xg5 31.♕xg5

In addition to mentioning the weakness of the e5-pawn indicated by Kasparov. Fischer pointed out that “now White must penetrate on either the rook’s or queen’s file.”

31...♖xa1

Preventing the threat mentioned by Fischer: 32.♖xa8 ♘xa8 33.♖d5.

32.♖xa1 ♘d7



Exercise: “Apparently defending everything,” wrote Fischer. How did he demonstrate that it was just appearance?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

33.♗d1!

“Bringing the bishop into the game puts additional pressure on Black’s overburdened pieces,” was Fischer’s comment.

White controls the open a-file, but to make further progress he needs to gain more advantages. And as well as general considerations, tactical precision is necessary, which Fischer achieves with this “fine move, in contrast to 33.♖a7 ♕d6! the awakened ‘Fischer bishop’ soon begins operating at full power,” commented Kasparov, adding that this manoeuvre to activate his favourite bishop was one of the distinctive features of Fischer’s play.

33...♘f6

As Fischer noted, Black can’t play “33...♕xe4 due to 34.♗f3 ♕f4 (if 34...♕c2 35.♖a7, with a winning attack) 35.♕xf4 exf4 36.♗c6 ♖e7 (or 36...♖d8 37.♖d1) 37.♖a8+! ♔g7 38.♖a7, and wins a piece.”

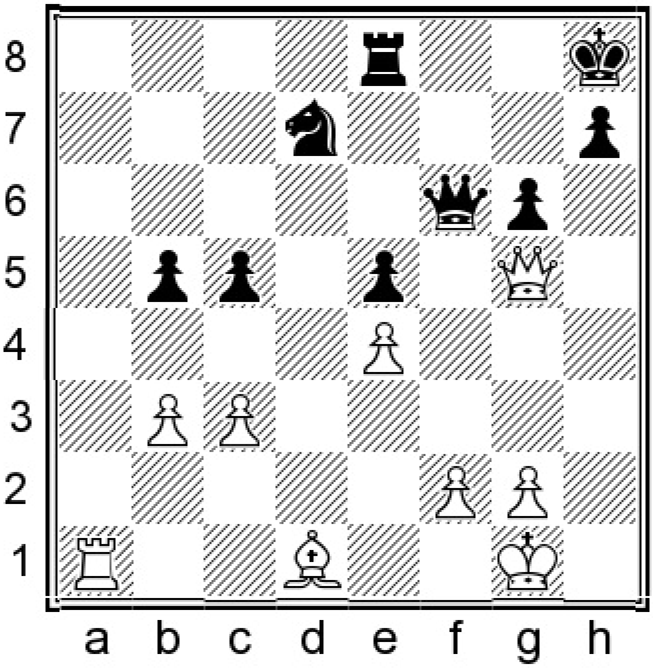
Hübner suggested simplifying with 33...b4, getting rid of the weakness on b5, but this seems inadequate, as after 34.cxb4 cxb4 35.♖a7 ♕d6, White is able to bring his bishop into play with 36.♗e2, increasing the pressure on the black king.

Exercise: After 36.♗e2 ♕d4 37.♖b7 ♖f8, what is the strongest move?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The one given by Kasparov, 38.♔h2!, preventing Black from capturing on f2 with check, with the idea of f3 and ♗c4, when Black “is too tied up and it is doubtful if he can gain a draw,” an assessment with which the engines agree.

Hübner’s other suggestion was 33...♕f6.



“To expel the white queen from its dominating position and reduce the pressure on the e5-pawn”. After 34.♕d2 ♘b6 he thought that Black would obtain counterplay on the d-file. Hübner shows remarkable faith in the black position, which is slightly worse in every respect: more passive pieces, weaker pawns and more exposed king.

Once again, the current engines are more in agreement with Kasparov, after 35.♕e3! ♕d6 (35...c4 36.♕c5!) 36.♗e2 b4 37.cxb4 cxb4 38.♖a7 ♖a8 39.♖b7 ♘d7 (39...♖b8? 40.♖xb8+ ♕xb8 41.♕c5) 40.♔h2 ♖b8 41.♖a7 ♖d8 42.f3 ♕f6 43.♕h6 ♕f4+ 44.♕xf4 exf4 45.♖a5, “Black’s defence isn’t easy.”

(Kasparov).

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

34.♖a7

Of course. “Infiltration!” (Fischer,) preventing 34...♘xe4? due to 35.♕h6 followed by mate.

34...♕d6

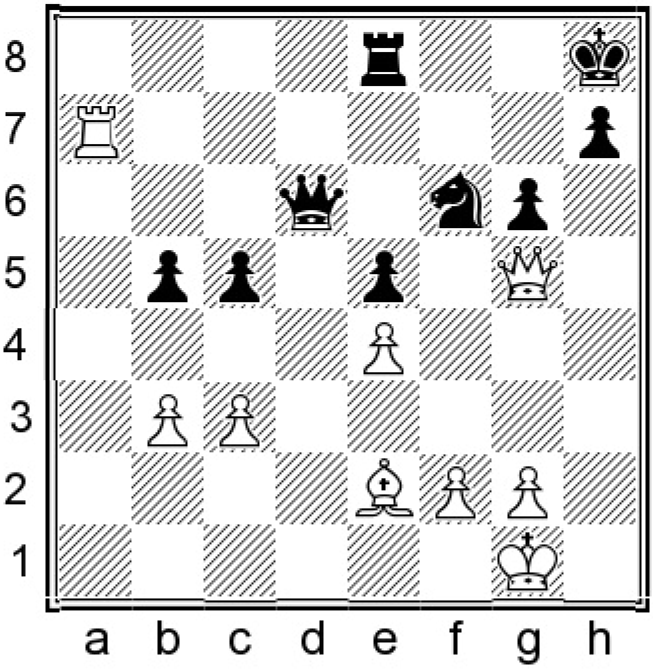
Exercise (simple): What now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

35.♗e2!

“Simply attacking a pawn. Curiously Black is in too much of a straitjacket to do much about it.” (Fischer).



35...♖e7?

Rightly criticised by Hübner, this is a clear mistake, losing a pawn without gaining anything in return.

"How can Black defend the pawn?," asked Fischer, and he shows that this is impossible: 35...b4? 36.♖a6 ♘xe4 37.♕h4 ♕d5 38.♗f3 ♕d3 39.♖a7 and wins; or 35...♘xe4? 36.♕h6 ♖e7 37.♕f8++; or 35...♕c6 36.♖f7 ♘g8 37.♕h4 h6 38.♕g4 ♖d8 39.♗xb5!.

Fischer provides more lines but in fact, as Hübner pointed out, there is nevertheless a defensive resource which places White's win in doubt, or would at least make it more difficult: 35...c4! 36.bxc4 (not 36.♖f7? cxb3! 37.♖xf6 ♕d8, and wins) 36...♕b6!.

White could play the apparently dubious to 37.♖f7, due to the attractive tactical resource 37...♕xf2+.

But this move doesn't really solve all Black's problems, White can respond with 38.♔h1! e.g. 38...♘xe4 (38...♕e1+ 39.♔h2 and now 39...♘g8 40.♗h5!, with the threat of 41.♖xh7+!, or 39...♘xe4 40.♕h6 ♕g3+ 41.♔g1 ♕e1+ 42.♗f1 and the checks have run out) 39.♖xf2 ♘xg5 40.cxb5 with the better ending.

Instead of 37.♖f7 White can also try 37.cxb5, when 37...♕xa7? 38.♕xf6+ ♕g7 would not be satisfactory, as now 39.♕c6 or 39.♕d6 would give White a very advantageous ending with his two connected passed pawns on the queenside. Instead of that, 37...♘xe4 38.♕e3 ♕xe3 39.fxe3 ♘xc3 would allow Black to offer tenacious resistance, but White could vary with 38.♖xh7+ ♔xh7 39.♕h4+ ♔g7 40.♕xe4, again with two connected passed pawns for the exchange, but here it seems that Black has better chances of blockading them; also Black has the often favourable ♕+♘ team.

The engines also suggest that 37.♕h4 (defending f2 but maintaining the pressure) and 37.c5 would require accurate defence from Black.

Nevertheless, 35...c4! 36.bxc4 ♕b6! was the best defensive try and Kasparov was probably correct when he wrote that nowadays "any grandmaster would play this without much thought."

36.♖xe7 ♕xe7 37.♗xb5 ♔g7 38.♗e2

Question: Well, this should be simple for Fischer now; he's a pawn up for nothing, so it's just a question of time, isn't it?

Show/Hide Solution

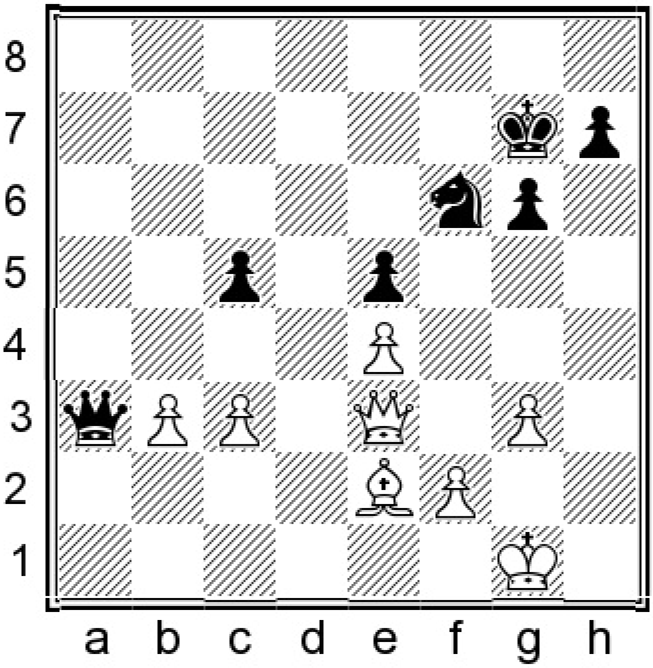
Answer: Fischer didn't see it like that: "The win is still far from clear. White's major technical problem is creating a passed pawn on the queenside while sheltering his king from a perpetual check."

38...♕c7

Threatening ...♘xe4.

39.♕e3 ♕a5 40.g3 ♕a3

Kasparov agrees with Fischer, who suggested that Black should “wait around with 40...♕c7”; the engines prefer 40...h6, but in both cases Black’s defence would be passive, which is not to anyone’s liking. So, it is understandable that Black should try to activate his queen.



41.♔g2

Fischer commented that it was “sharper and possibly immediately decisive” to play 41.b4! cxb4 42.♕c5!; Kasparov agreed and gave the line 42...♕xc3 43.♕e7+ ♔h6 44.♕xf6 ♕e1+ 45.♗f1 ♕xe4 46.♕f7! (halting the b4-pawn) and the path to victory would be shorter.

The engines of 2021, which have no fear of complications, initially prefer Fischer’s move 41.♔g2, since in Kasparov’s line, instead of 42...♕xc3, Black can play 42...♕a2.

Exercise (difficult): In a short while the engines change their mind and consider White’s advantage to be a winning one. What do you think the engines suggest after 42...♕a2?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The line 43.♕e7+ ♕f7 44.♕xb4 ♕c7 is unconvincing, as although White is better, there is a long struggle ahead. In contrast, the queen ending after 43.cxb4! ♕xe2 44.♕e7+ ♔g8 45.♕xf6

♕e1+ 46.♔h2 ♕xe4 47.b5 gives White a decisive advantage.

41...♕a5

Fischer commented that the ending after 41...♕xb3 42.♕xc5 ♘xe4 (or 42...♕e6 43.♗c4, indicated by Gligorić) 43.♕xe5+ ♘f6 44.c4 should be winning for White, who has achieved his objective of creating a passed pawn while keeping his king secure.

42.♕d3

The queen is going to prepare the advance b4.

42...♕b6 43.♕c4 ♕c6 44.♗d3

Fischer doesn't want to give Black any practical chances by playing 44.f3, because it weakens the second rank and the area around the king.

44...♕b6

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

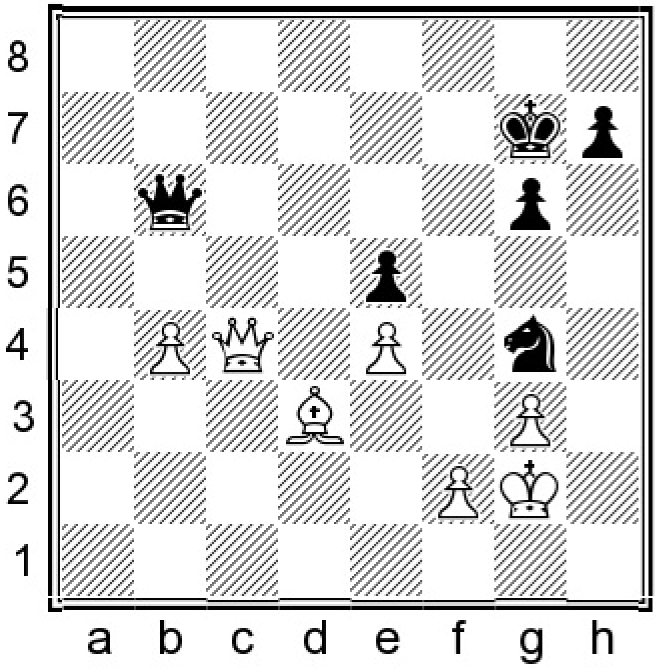
45.b4

Of course; there is no need for further preparation.

45...cxb4 46.cxb4

"Step one is completed: White has a passed b-pawn." (Fischer).

46...♘g4



Exercise: What now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

47.♕c5!

Forcing the exchange of queens, since 47...♕d8? loses the e5-pawn after 48.♗e2.

47...♕xc5 48.bxc5 ♔f7

Exercise: How did Fischer’s winning technique proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

49.f4!

“The idea is to create another passed pawn in the centre.” (Fischer).

49...♔e7 50.♔f3 ♘f6

“On 50...h5 51.♗c4 maintains the bind (if 51...♔d7? 52.♗f7)” (Fischer).

Exercise: What next?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

51.♗b5

Restricting the knight; of course not 51.fxe5? ♘d7, and Black draws.

51...♔e6

Black doesn’t want to capture on f4, so as not to allow White his much-desired second passed pawn, so he maintains the blockade for as long as possible.

52.♗c4+ ♔e7

Exercise: Now that the black king has moved away from the defence of e5, how did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

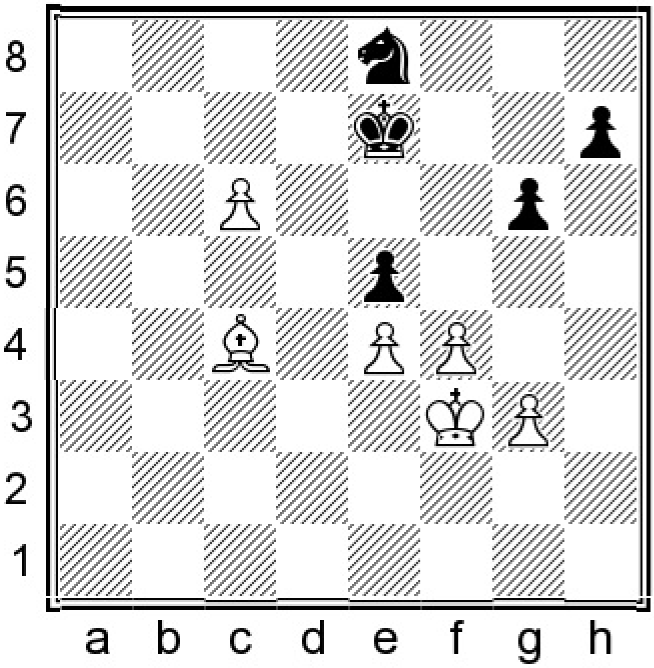
Answer:

53.c6!

Once again, not 53.fxe5? ♘d7 with a draw. After the text move Black can no longer keep waiting, as 53...♔d6? loses to 54.fxe5+ ♔xe5 55.c7.

53...♘e8

This makes things easy for White. But Fischer indicated that even the best defence, 53...exf4, was inadequate. The two passed pawns win after 54.gxf4 ♘e8 55.e5 ♘c7 56.♔e4 ♘e8 (if 56...h5 57.♔f3 wins), and here he gives a sample line: 57.♗g8 ♔f8 58.♗xh7 ♔g7 59.♗xg6 ♔xg6 60.f5+ ♔g5 61.f6! ♔g6 62.♔d5 ♔f7 63.♔c5 ♔e6 64.♔b6, and White wins.



Exercise (simple): How did White proceed here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

54.fxe5

Of course; White gains a second passed pawn at a moment when the defence ...♘d7 is unavailable. Now White plans to centralise his king and invade the queenside to support his pawns.

54...h6 55.♔e3 ♘c7 56.♔d4 h5

“His last chance.” (Kasparov).

Exercise: What is the quickest way now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

57.♔e3!

The aim now is to attack the black pawns with the king and the bishop in order to gain more access routes for the monarch. The threat is 58.♔f4.

57...g5 58.♗e2 h4

If 58...♔e6 then 59.♔d4! (“a flamboyant and, more importantly, effective pendulum-like manoeuvre on the squares d4-e3-f4” according to Kasparov) 59...h4 60.gxh4 gxh4 61.♗g4+, and wins (Gligorić).

59.gxh4 gxh4

Now the way is clear for White’s king and bishop.

60.♗c4 ♘e8 61.♔f4 ♔d8 62.♔g4 ♔c7 63.♗f7!

Depriving the black knight of what little mobility he had.

63...♘g7 64.♔xh4 ♔xc6 65.♔g5

White has a simple win after 65...♔d7 66.♔f6 ♘e8+ 67.♗xe8+.

1–0

Game 10

First win against a Soviet master

Fischer learnt Russian so that he could read the amazing chess literature in that language and he studied it in depth. His first contact with “the Russians” was in the 1958 Portoroz Interzonal Tournament, in Yugoslavia, where he drew four games against them, against Mikhail Tal, Tigran Petrosian, Yuri Averbakh and David Bronstein.

The tournament was won by Tal, while Fischer achieved his declared aim of occupying one of the six qualifying places for the 1959 Candidates Tournament.

This is how the magazine *Shakhmaty v. SSSR* described Fischer’s play following the Portoroz event:

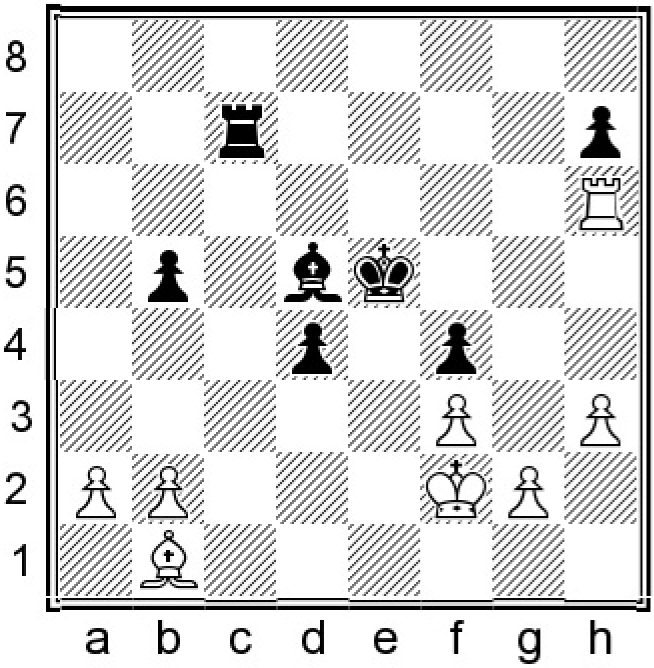
“The US champion is, of course, a bright new star on the chess horizon. At the age of 15 he is already an accomplished Grandmaster with a subtle intuition and extensive knowledge. The defensive skill of this boy is staggering: he tirelessly seeks every saving opportunity, and, given the slightest chance, he launches a counter-attack.”

After that tournament, his next brush with “the Russians” was in the 1959 Zurich Tournament, which was also won by Tal, followed by the Yugoslav Gligorić, while Fischer shared third place with the Estonian Keres, one point behind Tal. There Fischer had his first win against a Soviet grandmaster, Paul Keres, “the uncrowned champion,” one of the strongest players in history who never managed to become World Champion.

It is thought that after this victory Fischer now began to be seen as a serious opponent for the Soviet chess players, who until then had been the absolute leaders.

Some time later Tal commented: “Already in Zurich it was not an easy matter to play against the sixteen-year-old Fischer. His immeasurable thirst for victory and the considerable improvement in his standard of play made him a difficult opponent for anyone who took him on. Fischer disliked easy draws and he would play on until the material on the board was completely exhausted.”

Robert Fischer
Paul Keres
Zurich (12), 03.06.1959



White to move

This position was reached after a titanic struggle, with time trouble and mistakes on both sides, although Fischer always had the better chances.

Let’s look at the instructive final stage. White is pawn up but his advantage might not be enough to win; there is little material remaining and the three active pieces, together with the passed d pawn, offer Black good counterplay.

The position is so complex that even for Keres and Fischer it is easy to make mistakes.

Exercise: White has several possibilities; how did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

47.♖h5+

Retaining some winning chances; not 47.♖b6 ♖c1 48.♗xh7? ♗c4, as Fischer indicated.

47.♖xh7 is also insufficient to win, as after 47...♖c1 48.♖e7+ ♗e6 (preventing 49.♖e1) 49.♗d3 ♔d6 50.♖e8 Black gains enough counterplay with 50...♗c4 (to make use of his passed pawn), e.g. 51.♖d8+ ♔e5 52.♖c8 ♖a1 53.♗xc4 bxc4 54.♖c5+ (54.♖xc4 d3 55.♖e4+ ♔d5 56.♖e8 ♔c4 is similar) 54...♔d6 55.♖xc4 ♔d5 56.♖c8 d3 57.♖d8+ ♔c4 58.h4 ♖b1!, and the white pawns will fall one after the other; White must halt the passed pawn and cannot exploit his material advantage.

47.♖h5+ ♔d6

Exercise: Here Fischer made a mistake; in his book he indicated the best continuation – what is it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

48.♖f5?

Fischer wrote that 48.♖xh7 was no better, e.g. 48...♖c1 49.♗d3 ♗c4, with equality, while 48.♗xh7 can be answered with 48...♗xa2 49.♗e4 ♗c4! (Kasparov).

Fischer indicated that the winning move was 48.b3!, which eliminates Black's ever-present counterplay based on ...♗c4, and after 48...♖c1 49.♗e4! ♗xe4 50.fxe4 he considered that White's advantage was possibly winning. Kasparov agreed with this assessment.

The endgame expert Karsten Müller considered that 49...♗e6 offered greater resistance, e.g. 50.♖xb5 (50.♖h6 ♔e5 51.♖xh7 is another possibility) 50...♖a1 51.♔e2 ♖xa2+ 52.♔d3 ♖xg2 and although White can continue to press with 53.h4, there is no assurance of victory.

48...♖c1 49.♗d3 ♖d1

Exercise (simple): Why does the 'panacea' 49...♗c4? not work here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Due to 50.♖xf4! ♗xd3 51.♖xd4+.

50.♔e2

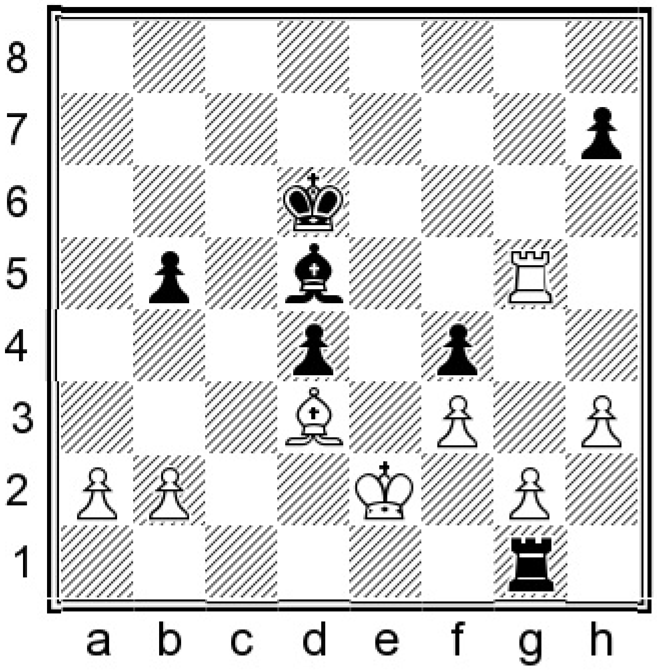
Question: Wasn’t 50.♗xb5 better?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: As Kasparov indicated, Black would be able to make good use of his passed pawn with 50...♖d2+ 51.♔f1 ♗xa2 52.♖xf4 ♖xb2 53.♗d3 ♔c5, with the idea of ...♖d2, and White would eventually have to give up his bishop for pawn; let’s take this line a little further: 54.♖f5+ ♔d6 55.♖h5 ♖d2 56.♗xh7 ♗c4+ 57.♔g1 ♖d1+ 58.♔h2 d3.

The move played also fails to yield a clear advantage, but it keeps more tension in the position.

50...♖g1 51.♔f2 ♖d1 52.♔e2 ♖g1 53.♖g5



53...♗xa2

Keres was in time pressure. The text move is correct, but after the game he commented that he could have drawn more easily with 53...♖a1.

As an example, he gave 54.♗xh7 ♗c4+ 55.♔d2 ♖xa2 56.♔c2, which is correct, but now, instead of 56...♖a1? 57.♗d3, which offers White some winning chances, Kasparov refined the variation with 56...b4, although Black must defend precisely after 57.h4! b3+ 58.♔b1, and now even better than Kasparov’s suggestion 58...♖a7 seems 58...♖a8!, controlling h8, and after 59.♗g6 ♗f1 60.h5 d3 Black is no worse, e.g. 61.♗e4 ♖h8 62.♔c1 ♖c8+ 63.♔d2 ♖c2+ 64.♔e1 ♗e2, with sufficient counterplay.

54.♗xb5 ♖b1 55.♔d3 h6?

Black could have gained a draw relatively simply with 55...♖xb2 56.♔xd4 ♗b1!, as indicated by Fischer; Kasparov probed this line more deeply: 57.♗c4 ♖d2+ 58.♔c3 ♖c2+ 59.♔b3 ♖f2, and the extra pawn cannot be realised; Black should also hold after 57.♗d3 ♗xd3 58.♔xd3 ♔e6.

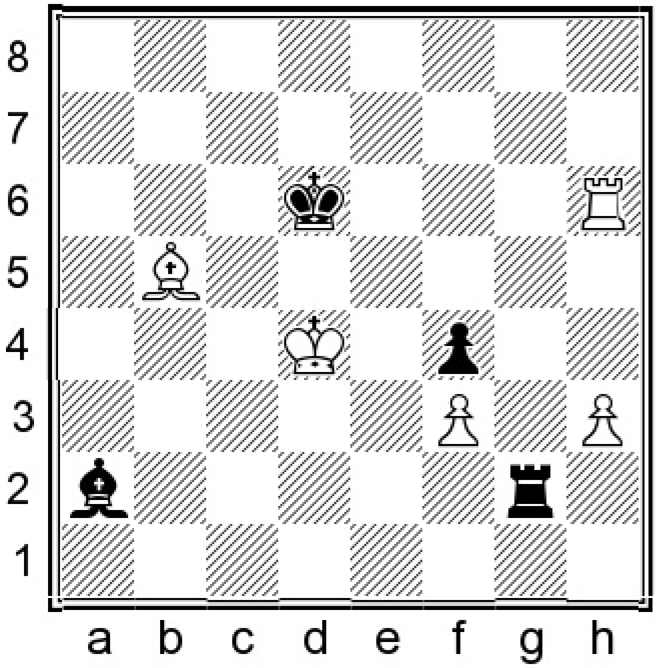
56.♖h5

Question: I don't understand. Now the h-pawn falls with check. It seems obvious that it was better to leave the pawn on h7, where it could be defended by the bishop. So how do you explain that Keres played 55...h6?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes, it is surprising. The only explanation can be that Keres was in time pressure. In those days the rate of play was two and a half hours for 40 moves, and the second time control was on move 56.

56...♖xb2 57.♔xd4 ♖xg2 58.♖xh6+



Here the game was adjourned for the second time.

Question: OK, the complications are over, the pawn on f4 is doomed, so the ending should now be relatively simple now, shouldn't it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: It's still not so easy, even with two extra pawns. First of all we should note that the h-pawn will queen on a dark square, and the white bishop is the "wrong" one.

Fischer explained that there are two technical obstacles for White:

1) The exchange of bishops would lead at best to a rook ending with f- and h-pawns, which is a theoretical draw, and 2) White can't exchange rooks if the black king can reach the f6-square, because this bishop ending, even with two extra pawns, is a draw, as we shall see further on.

58...♔e7 59.♔e4 ♖g5

Exercise: In order to win, Fischer still had one obstacle to overcome; he didn't manage it. Have a try yourself – what would you play here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

60.♗a6?

Fischer commented that it would be a mistake to play 60.♗d3? because of 60...♗f7! 61.♔xf4 ♖h5 62.♖xh5 ♗xh5, followed by ...♗xf3, reaching the ending mentioned above.

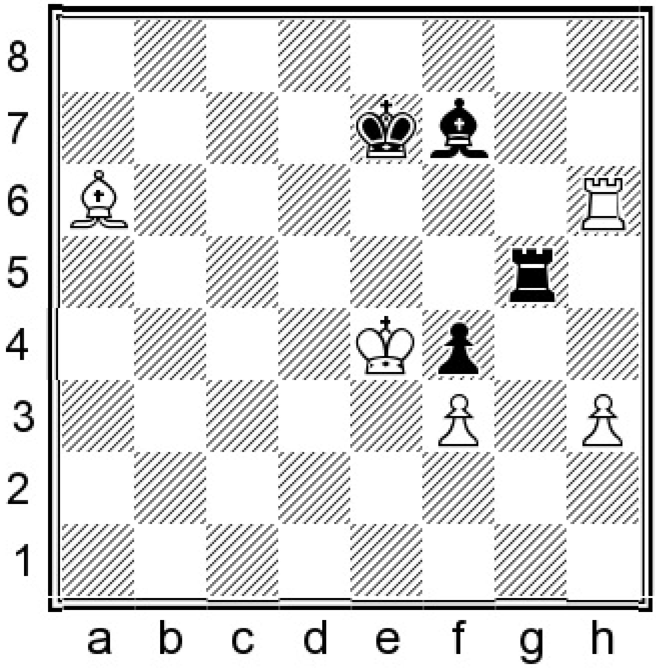
Keres thought that 60.♗f1! was the winning move; now 60...♗f7 allows 61.♔xf4 and if 61...♖h5 and the rook retreats along the sixth rank, while after 61...♖g6 62.♖xg6 ♗xg6 63.♔g5 the black bishop will not be able to sacrifice itself for the f3-pawn, so a similar ending to the game would be reached.

In the event of 60...♖g1 61.♗a6! White would have gained a tempo with respect to the game - a vital tempo, as we shall see, ruling out the resource that was available in the game.

60...♗f7?

Keres told Fischer that he had reached this position in his adjournment analysis but at the board he forgot the drawing line.

The correct was 60...♗b1+! 61.♔xf4 ♖f5+ 62.♔g4 ♖f6 63.♖xf6 ♔xf6, reaching one of the positions that White want to avoid, according to Fischer; the white king fails to reach g5, so the result is a draw.



Exercise: What was the idea behind Fischer's previous move?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

61.♗c8!

To go to g4, defending his two pawns.

Not 61.♔xf4? ♖h5, with a draw, as we have already seen, in view of 62.♖xh5 ♗xh5 and ...♗xf3.

61...♖g6

With 61...♖c5 62.♗g4 ♖c4+ Black can temporarily hang on to his pawn, but Fischer commented that penetration with 63.♔e5 still gives White a decisive advantage.

Exercise (simple): How should White respond to the offer to exchange rooks?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

62.♖h7

Of course; we already know that 62.♖xg6 doesn't win - after 62...♗xg6+ 63.♔xf4 ♔f6 Black draws.

62...♔f8 63.♗g4

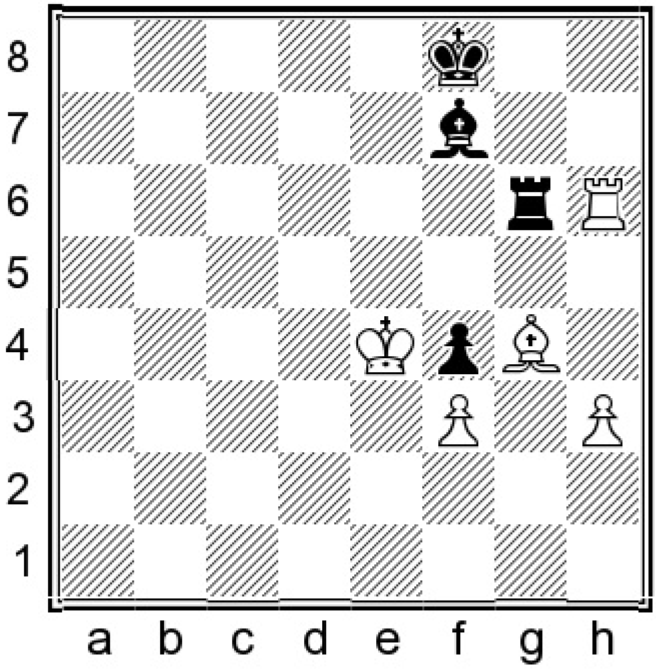
The threat is 64.♖xf7+ ♔xf7 65.♗h5; now 63...♖xg4 fails to 64.♖xf7+.

63...♖g7

It has been suggested that 63...♖b6 64.♔xf4 ♔g8 65.♖h4 ♔g7 gave drawing chances due to the awkward situation of the white rook. This is true, but it isn't necessary to take the pawn yet. Instead of 64.♔xf4 White can play 64.♖h8+ ♔g7 65.♖d8 ♖b4+ 66.♔f5, and the black position is still lost.

64.♖h6 ♖g6

Kasparov pointed out that 64...♖g5 was more tenacious, and it is true that after 65.♔xf4 ♖a5 White would have more problems, but this would not have changed the result.



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

65.♖xg6!

Of course, now the exchange of rooks is winning.

65...♗xg6+ 66.♔xf4 ♔g7

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer show here that he was correct to exchange the rooks?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

67.♔g5!

This is the difference; the black king is unable to occupy f6 and White can now advance his two pawns.

67...♗d3 68.f4 ♗e4

Exercise (very simple): How should the pawns be advanced?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

69.h4

Of course not 69.f5?? ♗xf5!; this is Black's only defensive resource now. White can prevent it by playing carefully, using his bishop as a screen, enabling the f-pawn to advance.

69...♗d3 70.h5 ♗e4 71.h6+ ♔h8

In the event of 71...♔f7, Fischer indicated how to proceed: 72.♗h5+ ♔g8 73.♗g6, and the f-pawn can advance.

72.♗f5 ♗d5 73.♗g6 ♗e6 74.♔f6 ♗c4 75.♔g5 ♗e6

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer get "back on the right track"?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

76.♗h5!

Preparing the advance of the f-pawn.

76...♔h7

Exercise (simple): Attacking the h6-pawn; how did Fischer proceed?

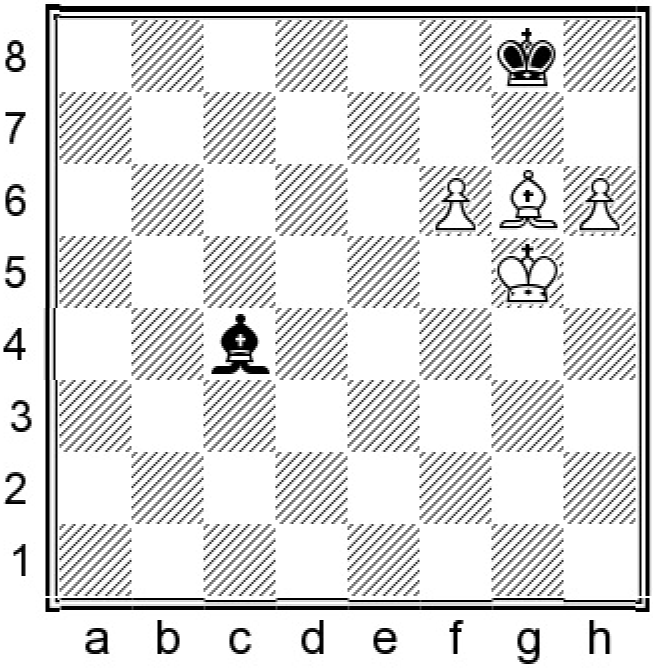
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

77.♗g4!

Of course, not fearing 77...♗xg4 78.♔xg4 ♔xh6 due to 79.♔f5, and wins. Now the f-pawn can advance.

77...♗c4 78.f5 ♗f7 79.♗h5 ♗c4 80.♗g6+ ♔g8 81.f6



Black resigned. White is able to advance his f-pawn and win in a similar way to what we have already seen, using the monarch and the bishop.

Fischer gave as an example this line: 81...♗b3 82.♔f4 ♔h8 83.♔e5 ♗c4 84.♔d6 ♗b3 85.♔e7 ♗c4 86.♗f7 ♗d3 87.♗e8! ♗c4 88.♗d7 ♗g8 89.♗e6 ♗h7 90.f7, queening.

1–0

What a hard-won triumph! Don’t you agree?

Game 11

A novel idea in the Dragon Variation

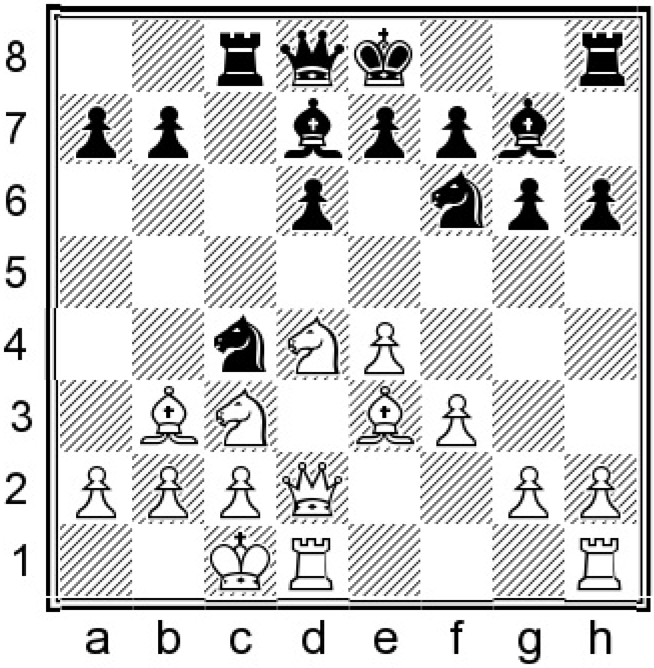
A long-standing idea about the Yugoslav Variant of the Dragon Variation is that, as White; if you have to choose, it is better to keep the dark-square bishop, even if you have to exchange the white square bishop.

There are many examples where Fischer stands by this maxim, but all the same Fischer was not rigid in his evaluations and sometimes he challenged ideas that seemed to be set in stone, as he does in this game.

In his first win against Svetozar Gligorić, one of the strongest non-Soviet masters, Fischer takes a surprising decision. Kasparov commented that White's chances are better with the traditional method, but pointed out that the practical worth of Fischer's choice is a different matter. Black is confronted with new, completely unexpected problems at the board, problems which in this game Gligorić does not succeed in solving.

Robert Fischer
Svetozar Gligorić
Sicilian Defence [B57]
Candidates Tournament, Belgrade (4), 11.09.1959

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♗c4 ♗d7 7.♗b3 g6 8.f3 ♘a5 9.♗g5 ♗g7 10.♕d2 h6 11.♗e3 ♖c8 12.0-0-0 ♘c4



White to play

13.♕e2

Question: What is the point of this decision?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: As already mentioned, this isn't a decision which gives White a clear advantage, but it was a very surprising one, and White's task now will be to demonstrate that his bishop on b3 will exert a powerful influence on the game.

13...♘xe3 14.♕xe3

Kasparov commented that the evaluation of the position depends to a great extent on the effectiveness, both in attack and defence, of the bishops of opposite colour on b3 and g7.

14...0-0

A natural and good move, but from the practical point of view, the black monarch now becomes a clear target for White.

A few months later, in Mar del Plata 1960, Marini played 14...♕b6!, activating the queen, which Fischer considered stronger; it threatens ...e5, but after 15.♕d2 ♕c5 16.f4 Black played the unnecessary 16...h5?, after which Fischer played 17.♘f3 ♗h6 18.e5!, and went on to win; but as Fischer pointed out, it was better to play 16...b5 or 16...0-0, with good play for Black.

Exercise: How did Fischer begin his offensive?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

15.g4

The tempo is important.

This is the correct move order; if 15.h4?! then Black can play 15...h5!, closing lines efficiently before focusing on Black's own offensive.

15...♕a5

Once again 15...♕b6, as suggested by Gligorić, was also to be considered, with the same threat of 16...e5. White must then move his queen and after 16.♕d2 (if 16.♖he1 ♕c5) Hübner gave 16...♕c5 and Black stands well, while the current engines (2021) prefer to start the attack immediately with 16...a5.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16.h4!

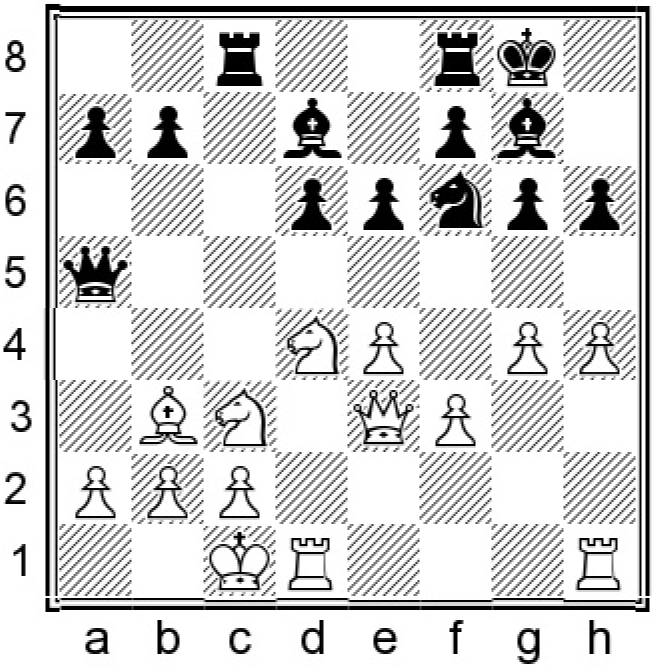
Of course, getting on with the attack. Gligorić wrote that he mis-assessed the position. He was expecting 16.♘d5?!, and after 16...♘xd5 17.exd5, instead of his suggestion of 17...♗a4, it is even better to play 17...♕c5, preparing ...b5, or else the continuation indicated by Kasparov, 17...♖fe8 18.♖he1 ♕c5, followed by ...b5.

From the course of the game so far, Kasparov drew conclusion that is easy to agree with, that Black is not adapting well to the untypical situation created by 13.♕e2.

16...e6

This move limits the scope of the strong bishop on b3 and by controlling d5 Black prevents White from playing ♘d5, which would exchange Black's defensive knight on f6. This comes at the cost of weakening d6, but Black still seems to have enough defensive resources.

Fischer thought that closing up the kingside with 16...h5 would not be good, as after 17.g5 ♘e8 18.f4, followed by f5, White would have the initiative. Then after 18...♗g4 (Hübner) White can make a strong exchange sacrifice by continuing after 19.♘d5 ♕d8, with 20.f5! (not 20.♖d2? e6 21.♘c3 ♕b6, and Black, despite his awkwardly placed knight on e8, is no worse, and White's initiative has been halted) 20...♗xd1 21.♖xd1 and here the current engines consider that White's position is winning, Kasparov analysed a little further: 21...♗xd4 22.♕xd4 ♔h7 23.♘f4 e5 24.fxe6, with a decisive attack.



17.♘de2!

Fischer awarded this move an exclamation mark, and far be it for this writer to remove it, especially in view of its crushing effect.

Fischer considered that Black can hold after the natural 17.g5 hxg5 18.hxg5 ♘h5 19.f4 by using our now familiar manoeuvre of 19...♕c5, threatening ...e5.

Exercise: Everything indicates that Fischer underestimated his chances in this line. Can you see a way to advantageously neutralise Black's threat?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: 20.f5! is very strong; in the event of 20...e5 then 21.♘d5 exd4 allows mate after 22.♘e7+ ♔h7 23.♕f3 and ♖xh5+.

20...exf5 is no better, in view of 21.♘d5 f4 22.♕f3 ♗xd4 23.♖xh5, and wins.

Nevertheless, it is would possibly be better to respond to 17.g5 with the immediate 17...♘h5 18.gxh6 ♗e5, and Black seems to be OK.

17...♖c6?

The objective strength of White's idea was less significant than its effect in practice.

It is only this move which allows White to gain a perceptible advantage.

As Hübner indicated, it was preferable to defend d6 with 17...♘e8!.

Question: Really? You already mentioned this move in a similar position. Can it really be good to shut in the rook on f8 and remain with such a passive knight?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: In almost all positions it would not be recommendable, and it is not the first move a master would consider.

But you have to compare it with the alternatives and then look at the possible responses to each response, and even though “It is better to be healthy and rich than ill and poor,” we almost never have those two alternatives.

You have to choose between options which are not so clear, but if one has a serious defect, then you have to choose the other, as in this case.

After 17...♘e8! it isn’t easy to make progress for White; if 18.g5 then 18...h5, closing the kingside, or 18...♕c5 first.

If 18.f4 it is possible to play 18...b5 and there is also 18...♕c5, practically forcing the exchange of queens, because after 19.♕d3?! b5! Black’s is quicker.

Exercise (simple): How can Black’s move be punished?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18.g5!

Of course; now lines will be opened against Black castled position, without Black having any compensation, as would have been the case after 17...♘e8.

18...hxg5

Now, with the knight on e2, the defensive resource 18...♘h5 19.gxh6 ♗f6 is impossible due to 20.f4, and White’s attack continues.

19.hxg5 ♘h5

Exercise (simple): How to proceed now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20.f4

Of course, continuing to expand.

20...♖fc8

Exercise: And now? How to continue the attack?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21.♔b1!

In an attacking race it is very important to combine the attack with defensive measures which are indispensable.

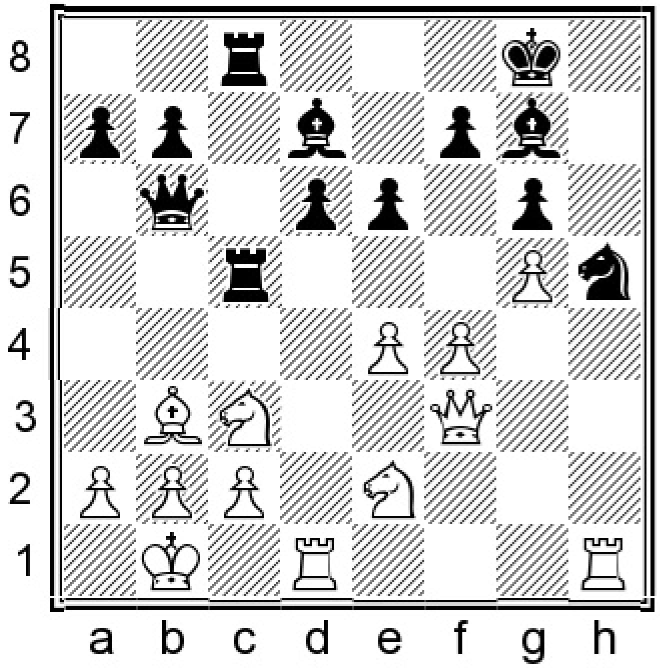
A line to consider in the first instance was 21.f5, which was not bad, although after 21...exf5 Which must choose between 22.exf5 and 22.♖d5.

Exercise: Why not the natural 22.♘d5?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Due to the spectacular 22...♕xa2!, when the queen is taboo and after 23.♘f6+ ♗xf6 24.gxf6 f4! 25.♘xf4 ♕a1+ 26.♔d2 ♕xb2 Black gains a decisive attack.

21...♕b6 22.♕f3 ♖c5



Exercise: “The threat of f4-f5 would appear to have been parried. The critical moment of the game has been reached.” (Kasparov.) How should White continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23.♕d3!

An unexpected move, to which both Fischer and Gligorić gave an exclamation mark; it deserves it, but once again for its practical effect, since it provoked an error and the collapse of Black’s game.

Fischer commented that the general feeling among the journalists and masters present was that he had blundered.

Naturally Fischer also considered 23.f5: “The more obvious 23.f5 looks good, but Black still has defensive resources with 23...exf5...”

And he then went on to provide some analysis of the position. Decades later, Robert Hübner improved on Fischer’s analysis.

The current engines largely agree with Hübner, that White can gain a winning position with 23.f5 exf5 24.♖xh5, although he must keep finding the correct path in situations that are extremely complex.

White could also already play the sacrifice “patented” by Fischer, 23.♖xh5!, e.g. 23...gxh5 24.♕xh5 ♗e8 25.f5 (threatening 26.fxe6) 25...exf5 26.♘f4 fxe4 27.♘fd5 ♕d8 28.♘xe4, with a crushing position.

Question: But in that case, why didn't Fischer play one of these two continuations, if the ideas were already so familiar to him?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Kasparov commented that the variations were very complicated and at the board it would not be obvious that they were advantageous, so it was justifiable to choose a safer move and, we could add, one which would still lead to an advantage.

Hübner agreed with Kasparov to a great extent, although he was more critical, based on the idea that Fischer's move could have been answered satisfactorily by Black; but, as we shall see, that doesn't seem to be the case.

23...♗xc3?

Black captures a pawn, but giving up this bishop looks suicidal, and it is, but Gligorić couldn't find anything better to defend the pawn on d6.

If 23...♖5c6 then 24.f5! is decisive, bringing the bishop on b3 into play, e.g. 24...exf5 25.♖xh5! gxh5 26.exf5; much the same happens after 23...♗f8 24.f5! exf5 25.♘d5 ♕d8 (25...fxe4 is no better, due to 26.♕xe4 ♗f5 27.♕xf5, and wins) 26.♖xh5! gxh5 27.♘f6+ ♔g7 28.♕h3, as indicated by Fischer himself.

Hübner's contribution was to propose a defence not mentioned by Fischer: 23...♗b5!, which is an improvement, since, as Kasparov explained, it succeeds in breaking the link between the knights at c3 and e2, which is holding the white position together, and it forces an exchange of queens.

Then 24.♕xd6 ♕xd6 25.♖xd6 ♗xc3 26.♘xc3 ♘xf4 is clearly bad, but White can do better with 24.♘xb5 ♕xb5 25.♕xb5 ♖xb5, and here, instead of 26.♖xd6 ♖b4! (Hübner) White has 26.c3! (Kasparov,) nullifying the bishop on g7; the knight on h5 remains inactive and the weakness on d6 is more important in the endgame; after e.g. 26...♖d8 White still has the plan of advancing with f5, hitting e6 and reviving the bishop on b3, possibly preceded by 27.♖h3 and ♖f1, keeping the black knight restricted, and then ♘c1-d3, ready for the final push with f5; meanwhile Black has no counterplay.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer recapture on c3?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24.♘xc3

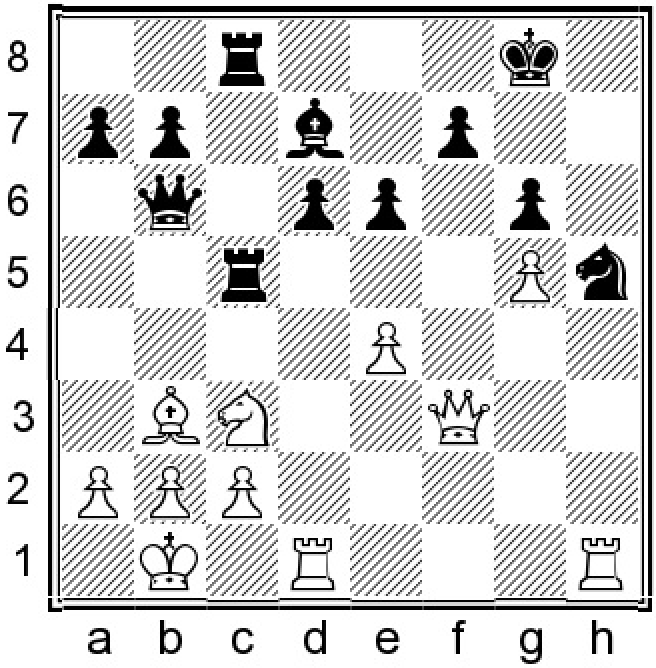
Of course; this was the idea, not 24.bxc3? ♗b5.

24...♘xf4

“This is what the crowd thought that I had overlooked.” (Fischer).

25.♕f3 ♘h5

If 25...e5 then 26.♘e2 wins.



Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

26.♖xh5!

The same sacrifice as against Larsen (Game 6), which motivated Fischer’s famous statement: “I’ve made this sacrifice so often, I feel like applying for a patent!”.

26...gxh5 27.♕xh5

27.♖f1 ♗e8 28.g6! was also good, but... “you can only win one point at a time” and Fischer achieves this with the move chosen, which is a natural one, opening the h-file.

27...♗e8

“The best defensive try.” (Fischer).

If 27...♔f8 then 28.♕h8+ ♔e7 29.♕f6+ ♔e8 (after 29...♔f8 many moves win, such as 30.g6 or the more obvious 30.♖h1) 30.♖h1 ♗b5 31.♗xe6! fxe6 32.♖h7, and wins.

If 27...♖a5, to defend against 28.♖h1 with 28...♕d4, White wins with the intermediate move 28.e5! (Gligorić).

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

28.♕h6!

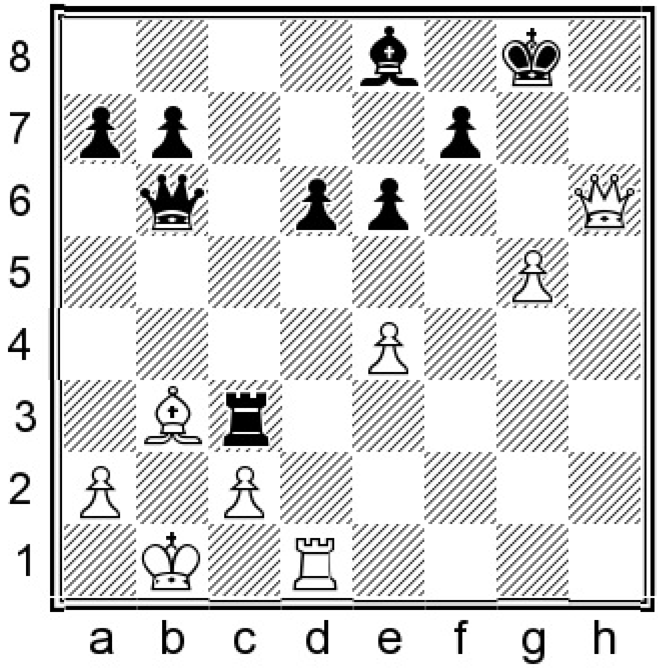
There is more than one winning move here; Fischer once again chooses the simplest and most “human,” preventing the escape of the black monarch and threatening 29.♖h1.

28...♖xc3 29.bxc3

Keeping it simple; 29.♖h1 also wins, but then Black can hold out longer with 29...♕d4 (Fischer).

29...♖xc3

Black would have had more practical chances of survival with 29...♕e3; after 30.♖h1! ♕xc3 31.g6 ♕g7 Fischer gave 32.♕h2!, (also indicated by Bronstein and Gligorić) e.g. 32...♕e5 33.♕h7+ ♔f8 34.♖g1! ♕g7 and now the quickest and most elegant way to win is with 35.♗xe6!.



Exercise: Which is the most crushing move now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

30.g6!

Opening up Black’s kingside irremediably.

30...fxg6 31.♖h1 ♕d4 32.♕h7+

And Black resigned, in view of 33.♖f1+ and mate.

1–0

Game 12

Van Gogh’s ear... and Fischer’s

Mikhail Tal won the 1959 Candidates Tournament in Yugoslavia, becoming the challenger to the World Champion Mikhail Botvinnik.

An over-optimistic Fischer declared to a journalist that he expected to win; the British journalist Leonard Baden maintained that Fischer was asked so many times how he expected to finish the tournament that he learnt to say “Prvi,” which in Serbo-Croat means first. His optimism was not reflected on the chess board; he drew for fifth place with Svetozar Gligorić, a long way behind the winner.

In the penultimate round Fischer lost for the fourth time against Tal, throwing away an advantageous position. The night before the last round he went to the cinema with a Yugoslav friend, the journalist Dimitrije Bjelica. The only film showing in English was "Lust for Life," a biographical film about the painter Van Gogh, which had won an Oscar in 1956.

Recalling the scene in which, after an argument with Paul Gaugin, a desperate Van Gogh cuts off his own ear, Bobby said to his friend as they left the cinema: "If I don't beat Smyslov tomorrow, I'll cut off my ear."

Although the prophecy would not have been carried out, Brady relates that "Fischer, playing brilliantly with the black pieces the next day, won his first game ever against the Russian, a former World Champion. The parallels of Bobby's life to Van Gogh's go only so far, however. Bobby's ear remained intact."

Vasily Smyslov
Robert Fischer
Sicilian Defence [B99]
Candidates Tournament, Belgrade (28), 28.10.1959

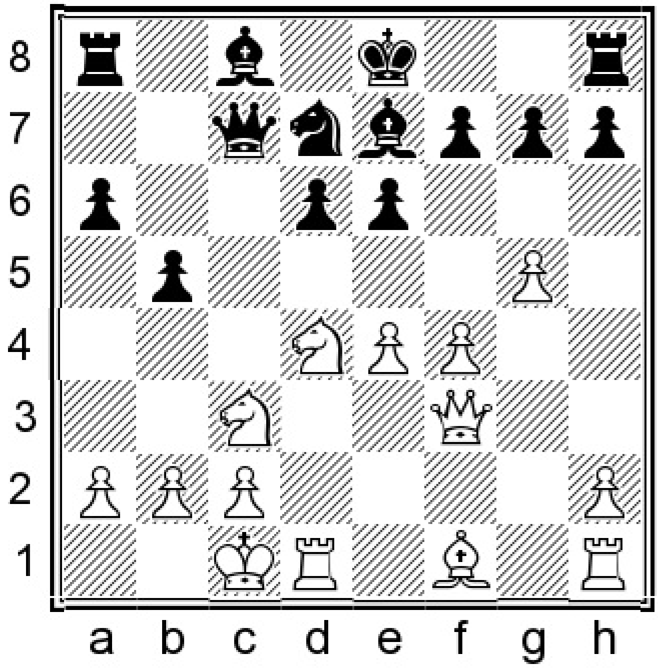
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗g5

This was the most popular line in those years, followed by the Fischer's favourite, 6.♗c4.

6...e6 7.f4 ♗e7 8.♕f3 ♕c7 9.0-0-0 ♘bd7 10.g4 b5 11.♗xf6 ♘xf6

In a previous round Fischer played the surprising 11...gxf6, which found few followers.

12.g5 ♘d7



13.♗h3

Fischer didn’t know whether this move was an innovation or a mistake in move order, and he commented that 13.a3 was necessary; this was the most usual move at the time and Fischer faced it on several occasions.

Opening theory is constantly changing, and later 13.f5 became the critical line.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13...b4!

Fischer commented that his game with Walther, in Zurich 1959, had taught him a good lesson. The position was not quite the same, but Fischer failed to expel the knight from c3 when he had the chance and subsequently the knight was able to jump to d5, helping White to gain a winning position.

14.♘ce2

Exercise: How to continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

14...♗b7?

Not fearing the “the speculative 15.♗xe6!?,” wrote Fischer.

Later Black obtained an excellent position with 14...♘c5!, as in Radjabov - Ivanchuk, Turin 2006.

15.♔b1

“In this sharp variation, White has no time for such amenities,” was Fischer’s apt comment, and he suggested that 15.♘g3 was a more useful move at this point than moving the king.

Over the board it would have been difficult to see that “the speculative (Fischer)” 15.♗xe6! was very strong; Fischer wrote that 15...fxe6 16.♘xe6 ♕c4 17.♘xg7+ ♔f8! favoured Black, but the current engines consider that White’s attack is very strong and more than compensates for the piece.

Question: But in that case, why didn’t Smyslov consider the sacrifice? Wasn’t that one of the possibilities provided by 13.♗h3?

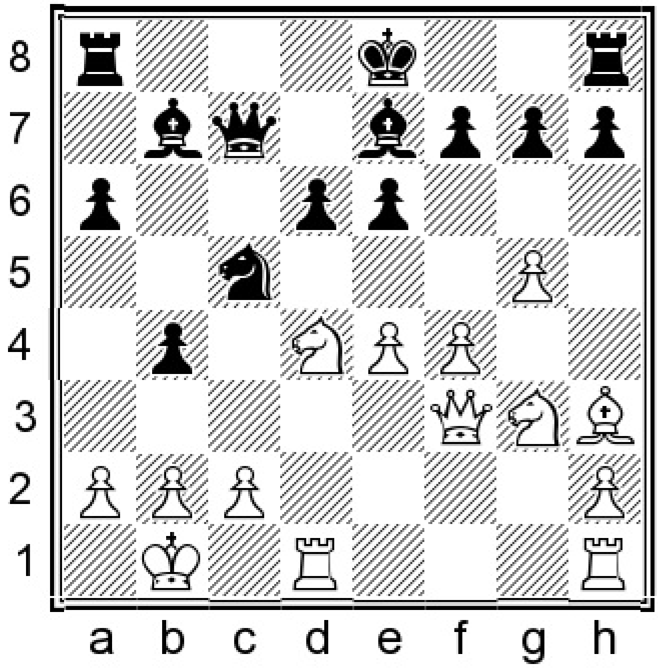
Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Naturally Smyslov considered the sacrifice on e6. There are many possibilities, but if we focus on the line given by Fischer.

White’s sacrifice is justified, but only with 18.♖d4!, a move with consequences that would be very difficult to evaluate when considering 15.♗xe6! This allows 18...♕xa2, when White must be willing to play a full rook down after 19.♖xb4 ♘c5 20.♖xb7! ♘xb7 21.♘c3, followed by ♘f5; the black king remains in great danger, and once lines have been opened matters will be even worse, but... it would have been extremely difficult to calculate this and other lines, which are so complicated that not even Fischer was able to make an accurate evaluation after the game.

Also it would not have helped Smyslov if he was haunted by the thought that he had forgotten to play 13.a3; it is impossible to be sure about this, but the course of the game seems to suggest that this omission was an involuntary one, as we shall see.

15...♘c5 16.♘g3



Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16...d5!

With the central break, helped by the absence of the knight from c3.

Fischer showed that already at the age of sixteen he was an expert in the psychology of competition, commenting “I could see from the expression on Smyslov’s face that he already thought he was busted.”

Objectively that’s not quite the case. The white position isn’t bad, but this matters less than the emotional aspect highlighted by Fischer.

17.f5

Here Fischer commented that Smyslov’s keen positional judgement must have told him that after 17.e5 g6! 18.♖c1 ♕b6!, securing the kingside, and if 19.c3 a5, followed by ...0-0, would be desperate for White; hence his decision to sacrifice a pawn.

Question: Why is this so serious?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Because in the above line the game would be transformed into an attacking race against kings castled on opposite sides, a race in which Black would already have a substantial lead and would therefore be able to use all his pieces in the attack.

Nevertheless, Robert Hübner indicated that in that line it was preferable to play 18.♗f1, followed by ♗d3.

17...dxe4 18.♕g4

White increases the pressure on e6, seeking to open lines, Instead, Hübner suggested 18.♕e3, after which Black must choose between two very different plans, namely 18...0-0-0 and 18...0-0 19.fxe6 ♗d5, and Black is fine, but no more than that.

18...exf5

Fischer plays the sharpest and most ambitious line, although this is not without risk, because it activates the white knights. Another possibility was to centralise the queen with 18...♕e5!.

19.♘dxf5

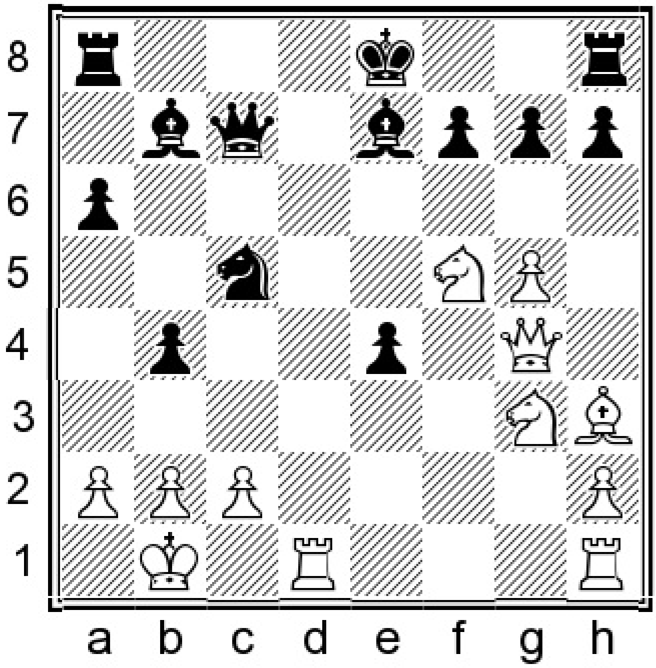
It is natural to capture with this knight, with the idea of sending the other one to h5.

It was more dangerous, for tactical reasons, to play the apparently less logical 19.♘gxf5!, when White would not be worse. Black might have to play 19...0-0 but then after 20.♕g3! ♗d8 21.♘d6 White would have compensation for the pawn and the black pieces would be poorly coordinated.

Exercise: In that case why not defend with 19...g6? What’s wrong with that?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: White can play 20.♘g7+ ♔f8 21.♘ge6+! fxe6 22.♘xe6+ ♘xe6 23.♕xe6, and the black king has no escape.



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19...g6!

“Perhaps this simple retort had escaped him,” was Fischer’s comment.

On the other hand, now, with the d-file open, it is more dangerous to play 19...0-0 due to 20.♘h5! g6 21.♕f4! (or 21.♕g3!) winning material, since if 21...♗d8 then 22.♖xd8! ♕xd8 23.♕e5.

The line isn’t so clear for the engines, which recommend 20...♔h8 21.♘fxg7 ♖g8, with the possible continuation 22.♖hf1 with rather unclear play; but who would play like that, with a simpler favourable alternative available?

20.♘xe7

On 20.♘h6 Fischer indicated a simple advantageous line: 20...♗c8 21.♕h4 ♗xh3 22.♕xh3 ♗xg5.

The current engines endorse this, although they prefer sharper lines, such as 20...♕e5! for example. Once again, this might well be a better move, but it would be difficult to be sure over the board without careful analysis, because the black monarch is far from being secure. In short, it is hardly practical to reject a very advantageous line which is also simple.

Now, with the other knight on g3, there is no point in playing 20.♘g7+?? ♔f8.

20...♕xe7 21.♕f4 0-0 22.♖d6 ♖ad8 23.♖f6

“Naturally Smyslov avoids swapping,” commented Fischer, although this concedes the d-file to Black.

23...♖d5 24.♗g4 ♘d7

A few moves earlier Fischer had commented, in words that are frequently used when there is such a clear advantage as here, with an extra pawn and the better position, that the rest “is a matter of technique.”

It is true that Fischer never had anything less than a clear advantage, close to decisive, but at several points he needs to choose between various advantageous lines. Here it was possible to play 24...e3, e.g. 25.♗f3 ♖d2 26.♗xb7 ♘xb7, followed by ...♖fd8.

25.♖f1

White tries to maintain the tension at any price. As Fischer indicated, Smyslov couldn’t capture the central pawn: 25.♘xe4? loses a piece after 25...♖d4 26.♗xd7 ♕xd7, while 25.♕xe4 loses to 25...♖d1+! 26.♖xd1 ♗xe4 27.♖xd7 ♕e5.

25.♕c7 fails to achieve much; 25...♗c8 is possible, but 25...♕e5! seems better, e.g. 26.♕xb7 ♘xf6 27.gxf6 h5, followed by ...e3 and/or ...♖fd8, with a complete bind on the position.

25...e3

Of course not 25...♘xf6?, which loses to 26.gxf6 ♕e5 27.♕h6.

“Passed pawns must be pushed!”; Fischer rejects the idea of first strengthening the position with e.g. 25...a5, while the engines mock us by preferring to “repent” and move the knight back with 25...♘c5.

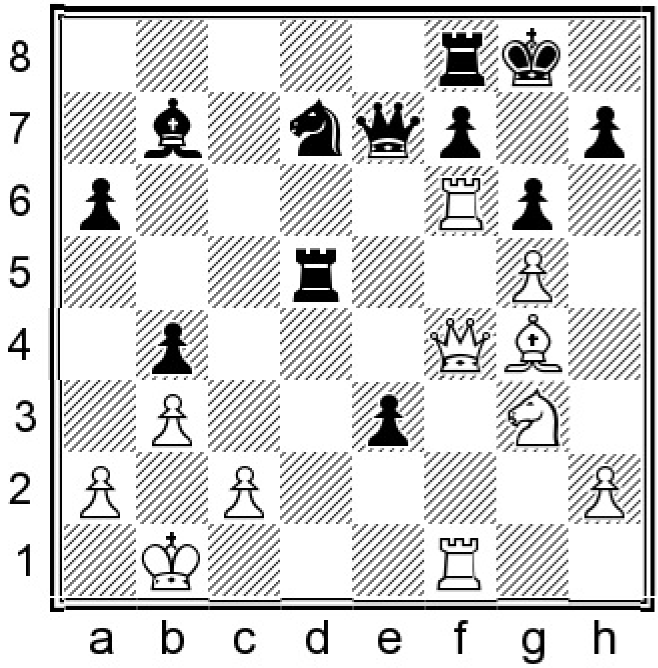
26.b3

It was possible for White to regain the pawn with 26.♗f3 ♖b5 27.♗xb7 ♖xb7 28.♖xa6, and this was better, but Black retains a big advantage after e.g. 28...♘c5 29.♖c6 and now for instance 29...♖d8.

Exercise (difficult): Getting back to the question of practicality, 29...♖d8 is effective, requires no calculation and is therefore a reasonable move to play. But objectively there is an even better move - can you find it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Black has the elegant move 29...b3!!, when in the event of 30.axb3 the attack along the a-file is decisive after 30...♖a8, while after 30.cxb3 Black's passed pawn is decisive after 30...♘d3 31.♕d6 e2, or 31.♕f3 ♘e5.



Exercise: How did Fischer continue here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

26...♖d2!

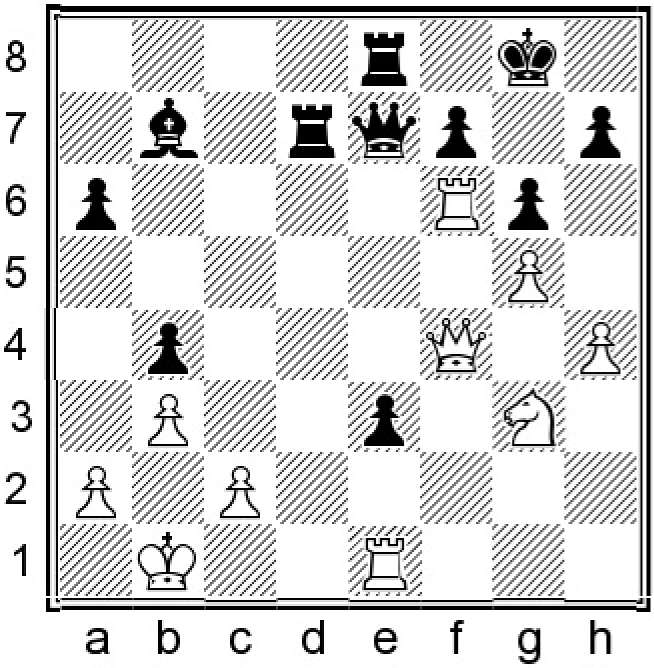
A natural move of great strength, putting pressure on both h2 and c2 and also threatening 27.-- 27...♘xf6, since White would not have time to play ♕h6, as after 28.gxf6 ♕c5! 29.♖c1 ♖f2 the f6-pawn falls.

27.♗xd7

Smyslov finally consents to simplification, which till now is something he has stubbornly been avoiding. However, as Fischer indicated, "now White's game rapidly deteriorates and the extra pawn makes its presence felt."

It was more tenacious to play 27.♕c7, although after e.g. 27...♗g2 28.♖e1 both 28...♖e8 and 28...♕e5 are very strong.

27...♖xd7 28.♖e1 ♖e8 29.h4



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29...♕c5!

With threats of 30...♕c3 as well as 30...♖c8 31.♖c1 ♖d1.

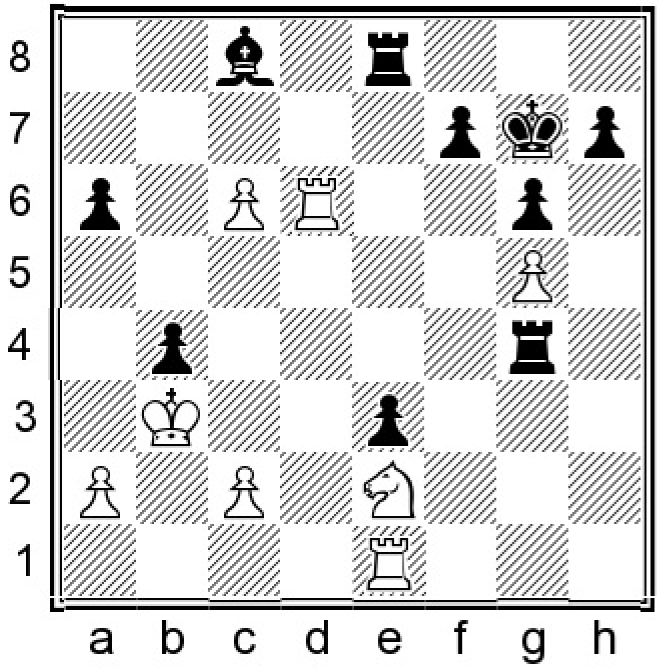
30.♕c4

This is almost equivalent to resignation, but by now there was nothing better; 30.♕g4 allows 30...♕c3, e.g. 31.♕xd7 ♕xe1+ 32.♔b2 ♕c3+ 33.♔b1 ♖c8 34.♕d1 ♕c7 35.♘e2 ♗e4.

30...♕xc4 31.bxc4 ♖d4

“Now Black hacks away unmercifully.” (Fischer).

32.c5 ♖xh4 33.c6 ♗c8 34.♖d6 ♖c4 35.♔b2 ♔g7 36.♔b3 ♖g4 37.♘e2



Exercise: The black position, with two extra pawns, is winning. Fischer continues to play the least complicated (but still strong) moves to make progress. What do you think he played here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

37...♖e6!

With this simplification he is able both to weaken White's c6-pawn and increase the value of his own e3-pawn.

After 38.♖xe6 ♗xe6+ 39.♔b2 ♖c4 Black wins easily.

38.♖ed1 ♖g2

The most direct, giving priority to the advance of the e3-pawn; 38...♖xg5 was also good.

39.♘f4 ♖xd6 40.♖xd6 ♖d2

This was the idea. Fischer commented that "Smyslov might have resigned had we adjourned here," but both of them continued to play quickly.

41.♖d3

Exercise: White's move was forced; why did Fischer provoke it?

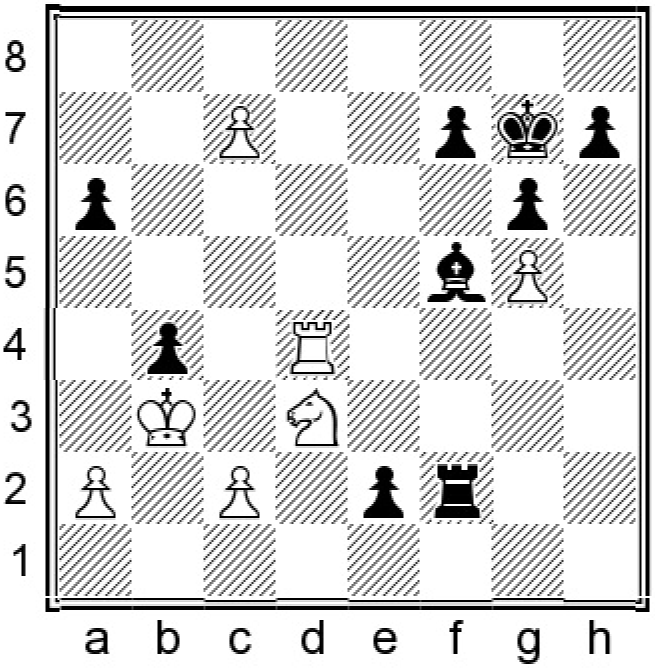
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

41...♖f2

Now if 42.♘d5 Black can exploit the position of the white rook with 42...e2 43.♖e3 ♖f3, and wins.

42.♖d4 e2 43.♘d3 ♗f5 44.c7



44...♖f3

Fischer commented that there was a quicker win with 44...♗xd3 45.c8=♕ e1=♕ 46.♖xd3 ♕b1+ 47.♔a4 ♖xc2.

45.c8=♕ ♗xc8

"Again 45...e1=♕ was quicker, but I wanted to avoid 'complications'," wrote Fischer, which is simply consistent with his effective approach throughout the game.

46.♖e4 ♗f5 47.♖xe2 ♗xd3 48.cxd3 ♖xd3+ 49.♔xb4 ♖d5 50.♖g2 h6!

The two passed pawns win without any difficulties.

51.gxh6+ ♔xh6 52.a4 g5 53.♖c2 ♖d6 54.♔c5 ♖e6

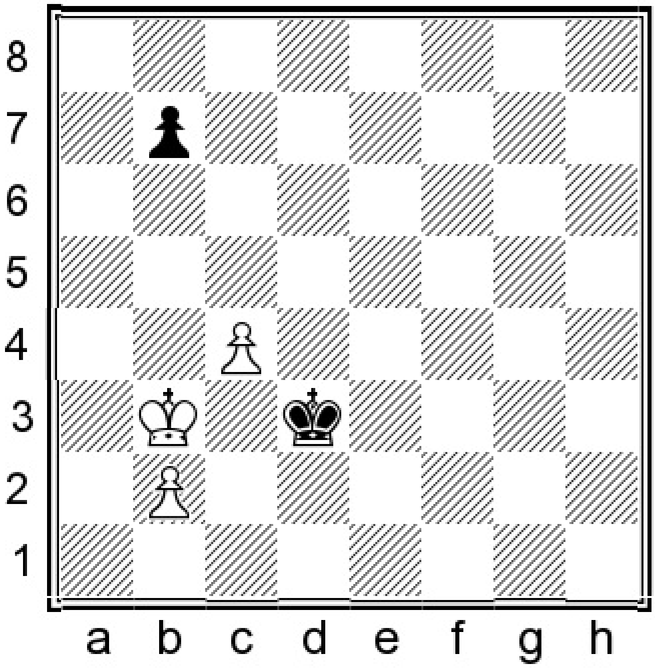
0–1

United States Champion for the third time

Fischer played poorly at the start of his third US Championship (1959-60), where he achieved the third of his eight titles in as many tries.

In the first round he defeated Arthur Bisguier after a serious mistake in a pawn ending. Let’s look at the end of that game.

Robert Fischer
Arthur Bisguier
USA Championship, New York (1), 18.12.1959



Black to play

Despite Fischer’s efforts to unbalance the play, Bisguier has defended well and this ending should be a draw.

The way to achieve the draw isn’t very simple and requires a sequence of several only moves, which a tired Bisguier was unable to find.

Exercise: Can you find the best move here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

55...b6?

The only saving move was 55...♔d2!, e.g. 56.c5 ♔d3 57.♔b4 ♔d4 58.♔b5 ♔d3! (the only move) 59.♔a5 ♔d4! (the only move, not 59...♔c4?? 60.♔b6 ♔b4 61.b3 and Black is in zugzwang; this is a position of reciprocal zugzwang) 60.b4 (or 60.♔b6 ♔c4 61.b3+ ♔b4 and here White is the one in zugzwang) 60...♔c4! 61.♔a4 ♔d4! (the only move) 62.♔b3 ♔d5! 63.♔c3 b6! (the only move) 64.cxb6 ♔c6, with a draw.

56.♔b4 ♔c2 57.b3 is also not winning, but although White is not threatening anything in this position, nevertheless there is only one saving move, 57...b6!, and now White is unable to advance with his king and pawns successfully.

55...b6? 56.♔b4 ♔c2

Exercise: And now it’s Fischer who only has one good move. What is it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

57.♔a3!

With the threat of 58.b4, which forces Black to worsen the position of his king.

Not 57.♔b5? ♔b3, neither 57.b3? ♔b2 58.♔a4 ♔c3 59.♔a3 ♔d3!, with a draw in both cases.

57...♔d3 58.♔b3 ♔d2

Or 58...♔d4 59.♔b4.

59.♔a4 ♔c2 60.b4

1–0

Game 13

Beginning the assault on the third national title

In the second round Fischer drew with Robert Byrne from a lost position (after Byrne accidentally allowed a draw by repetition), and in the third he drew with Raymond Weinstein in a rather unimpressive game.

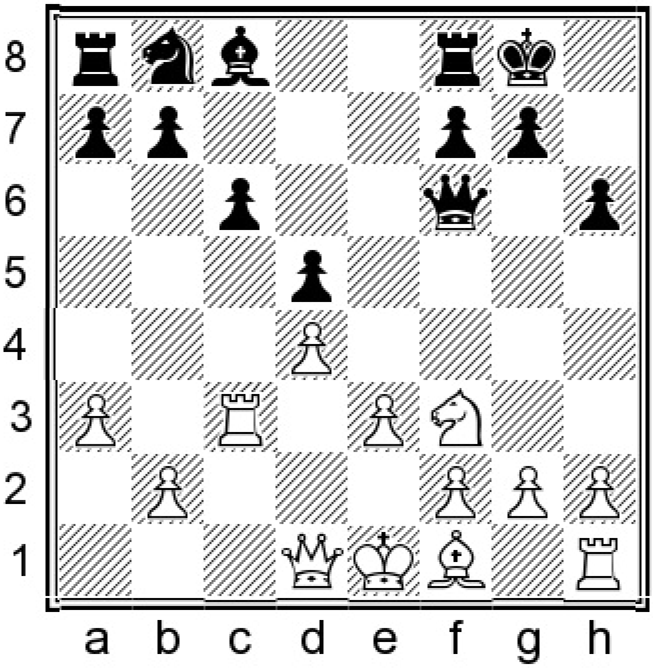
His opponent in the fourth round was Arnold Denker, who had witnessed Fischer’s chess progress in the Manhattan Chess Club tournaments in the 1950s. Denker had been one of the strongest United States masters in the 1940s, and was twice champion of his country.

From the 1950s onwards, he played much less often, with long periods of inactivity.

With this game, Fischer began his assault on his third title; in the final eight rounds he scored six wins and two draws.

Arnold Denker
Robert Fischer
Queen’s Gambit [D38]
US Championship, New York (4), 22.12.1959

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.♘c3 ♗b4 5.♗g5 h6 6.♗xf6 ♕xf6 7.cxd5 exd5 8.♖c1 0-0 9.a3 ♗xc3+ 10.♖xc3 c6 11.e3



11...a5

Directed against White’s typical minority attack with b4.

It is not easy to decide on the best move here. Fischer keeps the alternatives 11...♖e8, 11...♗g4 and 11...♗f5 in reserve.

12.♗d3

After 12.♗e2 there might follow 12...♗f5 13.♘e5 (13.0-0 allows 13...♘d7, followed by ...♕e7 and ...♘f6, heading for e4 at an opportune moment, with excellent play) and now 13...♘d7 14.♘xd7 ♗xd7 is possible, but perhaps slightly better would be 13...♖d8 14.0-0 ♘d7.

On the other hand, White is not well enough developed to play 12.b4?!, as after 12...axb4 13.axb4 Black has the annoying 13...♕d6, when it is awkward to defend b4, e.g. 14.♖b3, 14...♗f5 15.♗e2?! ♖a2!.

Or 14.♕b1 ♗f5!, when 15.♕xf5? runs into 15...♕xb4 16.♕c2 ♖a3 17.♔d2 ♕a5!, followed by 18...♖a2, while after 15.♗d3 ♗xd3 16.♖xd3 ♘a6 Black has the initiative.

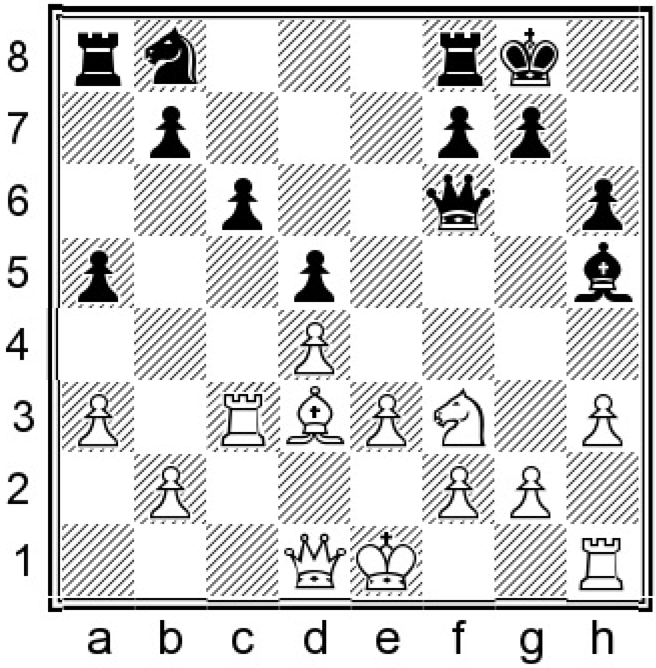
12...♗g4

Question: In similar positions Black can solve his difficulties with 12...♗f5; isn't that good here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: It's possible that objectively this was simpler and better, but for competitive reasons Fischer was not content to simplify and reach a simple position; he wanted a more complex position.

13.h3 ♗h5



Question: That's a surprise - isn't it good to double the opponent's pawns?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: That wouldn't be bad, but here the doubled pawns would not be a serious weakness for White, as after 13...♗xf3 14.♕xf3 ♕xf3 15.gxf3 Black's chances of sharpening the struggle are minimal, so Fischer rejects both exchanging on f3 and 13...♗f5, preferring to maintain the tension.

14.g4?!

Very aggressive; Black would have no problems after 14.0-0 ♘d7, but with 14.♕b3! (13.♕b3! was also possible) White could try to demonstrate that 12...♗g4 was slightly risky; 14...♗xf3 15.♕xb7 would be unpleasant, while if 14...♕e7, having unpinned, White can play 15.♘e5.

14...♗g6 15.♘e5 ♗xd3 16.♕xd3 ♕e7 17.♕f5

This is White's point in playing 14.g4; he prevents ...♘d7 and is planning to start an attack on the kingside.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer respond?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17...♖d8

Black prepares to play ...♘d7; this could also be achieved by playing 17...g6 18.♕f4 ♔g7, but Fischer prefers bring his rook into play.

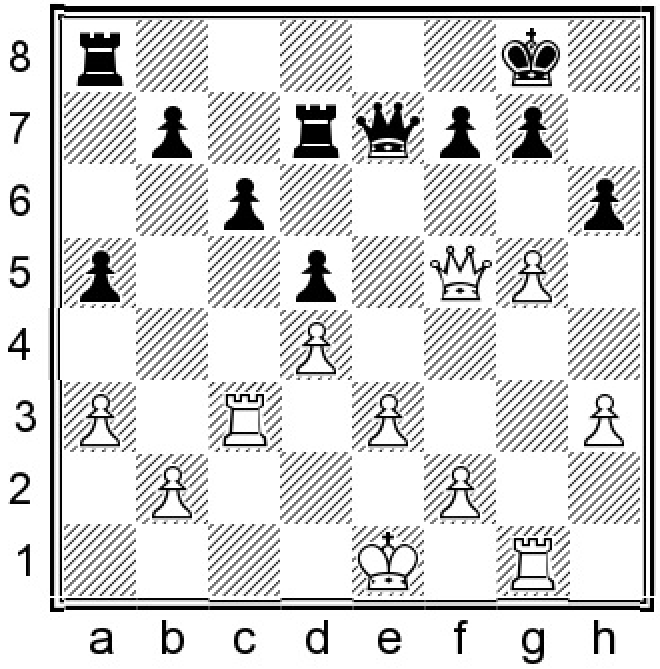
18.♖g1

This was the idea; it is very aggressive and optimistic but at the same time it represents a serious commitment, in the medium and long term, because his king remains in the centre.

18...♘d7 19.♘xd7

The alternative was to play 19.g5 first, but this is not dangerous to Black either; after 19...♘xe5 20.dxe5 (not 20.gxh6? ♘g6) 20...g6 21.gxh6 ♔h7 22.♕f4 White's offensive has stalled and Black can play 22...♖f8, intending 23...♖ae8.

19...♖xd7 20.g5



Exercise (simple): How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20...♖d6!

Bringing the rook into play; this is even slightly better than 20...g6 21.gxh6 ♔h7, followed by 22...♖d6.

21.h4

Maintaining his advanced post; both 21.gxh6 ♖xh6 and 21.g6 fxg6 22.♖xg6 ♖f8 are unsatisfactory.

Exercise: How did Fischer take another step forward?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21...h5!

Closing lines and leaving the white position overextended, since opening things up with 22.g6?

fxg6 23.♖xg6 ♖f8 would lose the h4-pawn, since if 24.♕g5? then 24...♕f7.

22.♔e2

22.♔d2 was to be considered, seeking shelter on the queenside.

22...g6

Forcing the White queen to choose which flank to operate on.

23.♕f3

White opts to leave the queen on the kingside to defend his weak flank; if 23.♕c2 then 23...♖e6, with the idea of ...♖e4.

Exercise (simple): How can Black make some further progress?

Show/Hide Solution

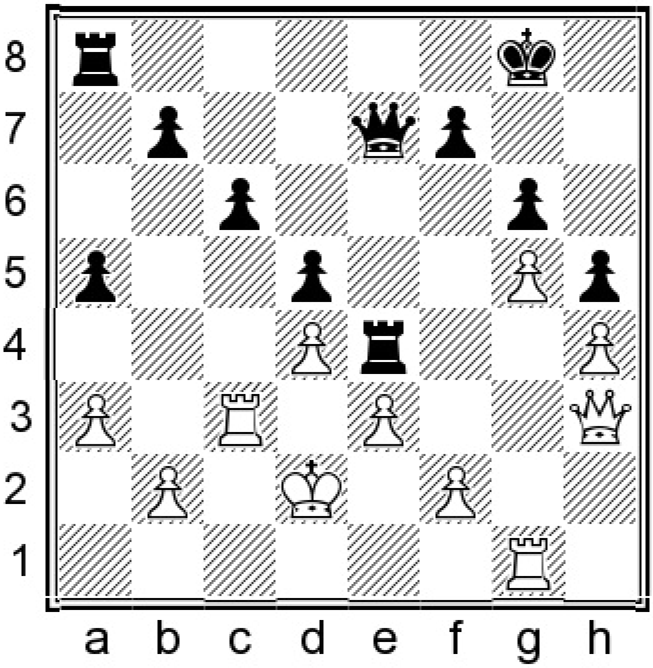
Answer:

23...♖e6

With the same reply; the rook is heading for e4, where it would threaten both ...♖xd4 and ...♖xh4.

24.♔d2 ♖e4 25.♕h3

If 25.♖h1 Black could prepare the ...f6 break with 25...♖f8.



Exercise (simple): How can Black make a bit more progress?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

25...♕c7

Exploiting the fact that the white queen is on the other wing, Black seeks to infiltrate on the queenside at an opportune moment.

26.♖gc1 ♖ae8 27.f3

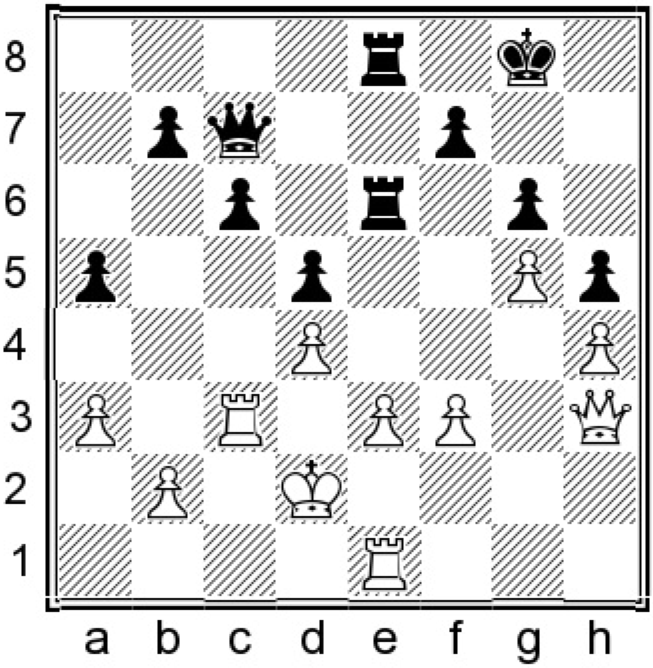
White doesn't want to have to worry about ...♖g4 and ...♖ee4 at some moment, which would force White to play the weakening move f4.

Question: But wouldn't f4 leave the black rook on g4 trapped?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The rook would be tying the white queen to the defence of h4 and in reality, after f4, "the cure would be worse than the disease," since it gives up control of e4 and the black queen can switch plans and go to ...♕e7, heading for e4, from where it would support an invasion on g2, while increasing the pressure on e3.

27...♖4e6 28.♖e1



Exercise: There is more than one attractive move here; what do you think Fischer chose?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

28...b6!

Preparing to break with ...c5 to exploit the position of the white king.

The "computer solution" is to carry out the same break by means of 28...♕b6, and after 29.♔c2 c5! 30.dxc5 ♕c6 Black is threatening 31...d4 and can regain his pawn after opening lines.

29.♔c2 c5 30.dxc5

This opens the b-file and makes the black pawns mobile. It's easy to criticise White for opening up the game like this, but it isn't possible to suggest anything much better.

If 30.♔b1 the simplest is 30...c4, followed by ...b5 and ...b4, although 30...♕e7 is also strong, and wins a pawn.

30...d4!

Even better than 30...bxc5, although this was also winning, as there is no good defence against the threat of 31...d4.

The all-powerful engines even consider that Black has a big advantage after 30...♔g7.

31.cxb6 ♕xb6 32.♖d3

Exercise (simple): Once again there is more than one good move; what would you play here?

Show/Hide Solution

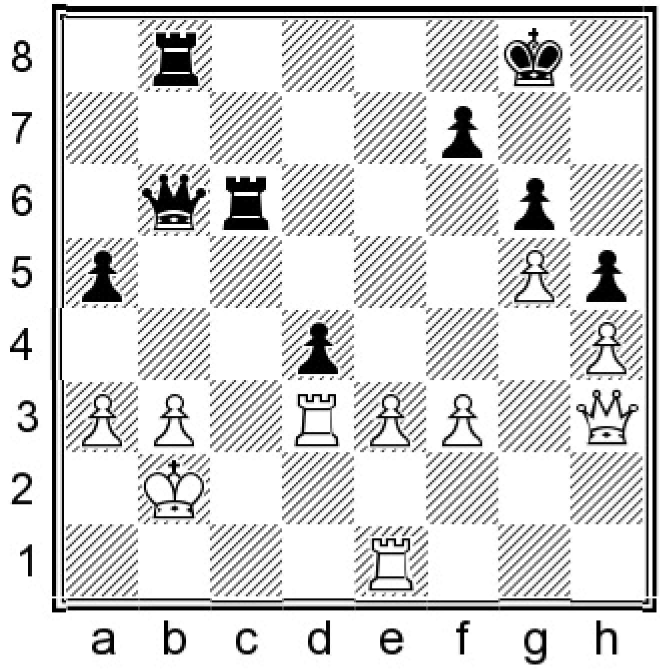
Answer:

32...♖b8

Forcing White's next move, which weakens c3, since if 33.♖b1 then 33...♕c6+ 34.♔d1 ♕c4.

33.b3 ♖c6+ 34.♔b2

After 34.♔d2 there are several winning moves, such as 34...♕c5 35.♖d1 dxe3+ 36.♔e1 ♖e8!, followed by ...e2, and wins, and also 34...♕c7!, with the idea of 35...♖c2+ and 36...♖h2!, and finally there is also 34...♖c3!.



Exercise (simple): What now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

34...♖c3!

The simplest, eliminating the white king’s best defender; it’s becoming clearer that the white monarch can’t be defended.

35.♖xc3 dxc3+ 36.♔xc3 ♕xb3+ 37.♔d2 ♕a2+!

Also good was 37...♕b2+!; the white king is being steered toward a mate.

38.♔d3 ♖d8+ 39.♔e4 ♕c4+ 40.♔e5 ♖d5+

It’s mate in three moves: 41.♔f6 ♕c6+ 42.♔e7 ♕d6+ 43.♔e8 ♕f8++.

0–1

Show in Text Mode

1960

Game 14

A model game

In the Mar del Plata tournament, which took place from the 29th of March to the 15th of April 1960, Fischer, who had recently had his seventeenth birthday, played Boris Spassky for the first time.

They played in the second round; Fischer had an excellent position but ended up losing. Fischer includes that defeat in his book *My 60 Memorable Games*.

In *Russians versus Fischer* they relate that Spassky spoke kindly of his future opponent for the world title. He pointed out Fischer's ability to play chess at any time of the day or night. "He can often be seen playing blitz games after a tiring evening adjournment session. (...) His interest in chess literature, especially Soviet literature, is amazing... Fischer is one of the most diligent readers of our chess magazines. He always follows which of his games are published in our press. Fischer's favourite chessplayer is J.R. Capablanca."

And as an example of Fischer's play Spassky gave the next game that we shall look at, played in the third round.

It is quite a simple game, but it is interesting to become familiar with it in order to acquire a basic knowledge of Fischer's favourite line, 6.♗c4 against the Najdorf variation. White manages to carry out his plans in an ideal way, helped by his opponent's weak defence.

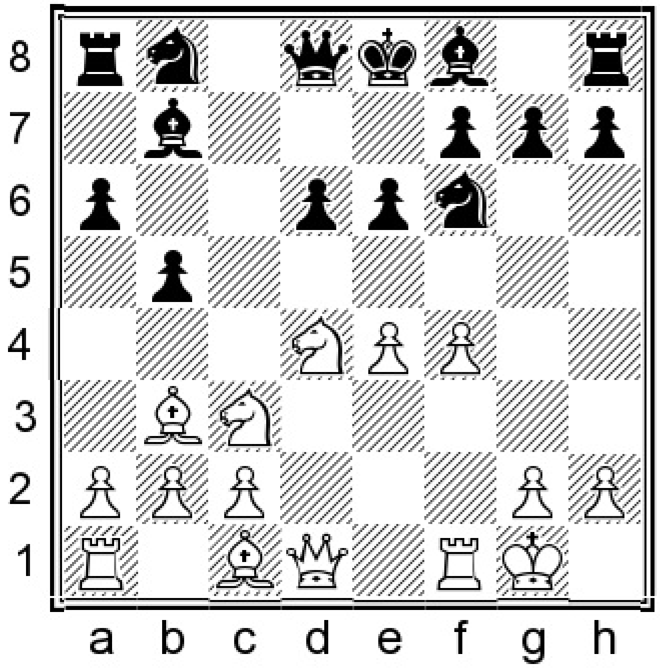
Robert Fischer
Olicio Gadía
Sicilian Defence [B87]
Mar del Plata (3), 31.03.1960

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗c4 e6 7.♗b3 b5 8.0-0 ♗b7

In Game 5 we saw 8...b4.

9.f4

Ten years after this game, in Fischer - Rubinetti, Palma de Mallorca 1970, White preferred 9.♖e1 and the game continued 9...♘bd7 10.♗g5. It culminated in an instructive model game, illustrating how to exploit the black king in the centre, as we shall see in Game 49.



9...♘c6?!

Question: This is a developing move, so why is it dubious?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Because, as we shall see, it lends more force to White’s main idea.

In addition to the sharp line 9...b4 10.♘a4 (or 10.e5) 10...♗xe4 11.f5, Black has a good reply in 9...♘bd7.

10.♘xc6

Question: So, this is the punishment? Exchanging?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Be patient, this is just the start.

10...♗xc6

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

11.f5!

Of course, this is one of the main ideas of the line; White wants to revive the currently passive bishop on b3 and to weaken the d5-square.

Normally Black is able to compensate for these difficulties with other advantages, but that’s not possible here.

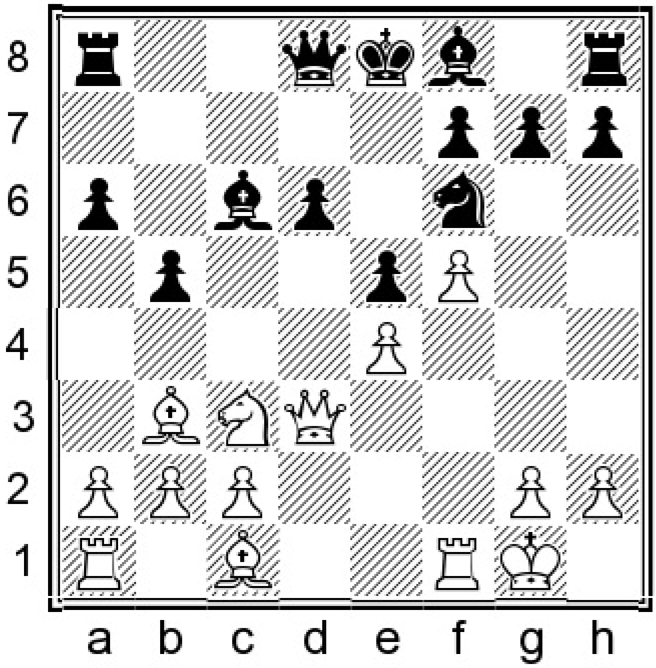
11...e5

Question: I understand that taking on e4 is too risky with the king still in the centre, but, isn’t it better to maintain the control of d5 by playing e.g. 11...♕d7?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The problem is that this isn’t a solution; another weakness appears, the e6-pawn, and after e.g. 12.fxe6 fxe6 13.a3, White plans ♕f3-h3, and perhaps g4, with a strong initiative.

12.♕d3



12...♗e7?!

Once again a questionable developing move; here it was better strike back with 12...b4!, e.g. 13.♘d5 ♘xd5 14.♗xd5 ♗xd5 15.exd5 (better than 15.♕xd5 ♕b6+, followed by 16...♖c8) 15...♗e7, diverging from the comfortable course that White is able to follow in the game.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer proceed now?

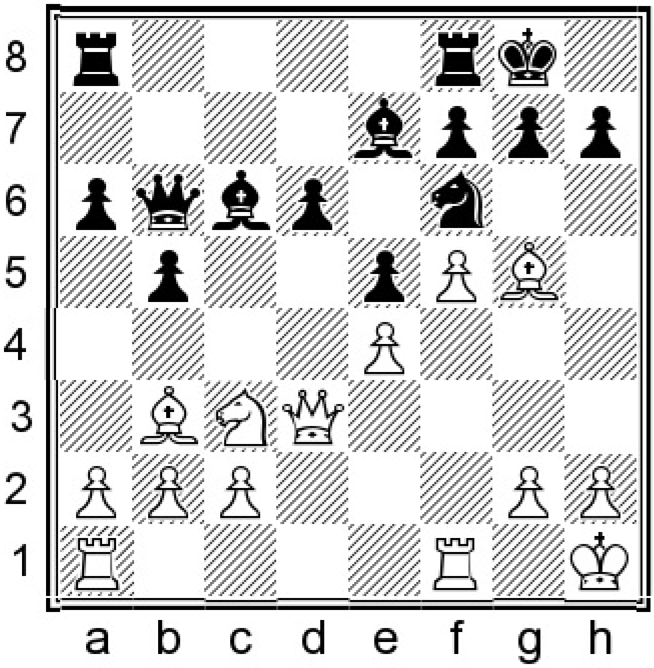
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13.♗g5!

The complement to the weakening of d5; White puts pressure on one of the defenders of that square.

13...♕b6+ 14.♔h1 0-0



Exercise (simple): What did Fischer play here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

15.♗xf6!

White extracts the maximum possible from the position: a powerful knight on d5 versus a bad dark-squared bishop. He starts by eliminating one of the defenders of d5.

15...♗xf6

Exercise (simple): And now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16.♗d5!

Now Fischer eliminates the other defender of d5. We should note that generally Black tries to avoid this type of passive position like the plague.

It is rare that White is able to arrange the exchange of light-squared bishops; generally Black plays ...b4 earlier, forcing White to play ♘d5, and although White is often left with a strong bishop on d5, this is not as powerful as the knight.

16...♖ac8 17.♗xc6 ♖xc6

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18.♖ad1!

Not immediately 18.♘d5? because then Black can play 18...♕d4!, and his typical black pressure along the c-file is effective.

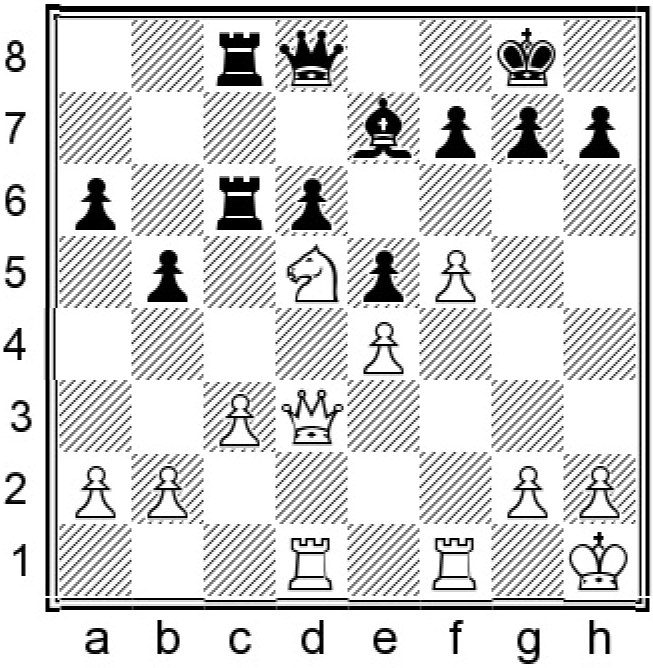
18...♖fc8?!

More tenacious is 18...♕c5, preventing White's idea, at least for now.

19.♘d5 ♕d8

Now 19...♕d4?? loses to 20.♘xf6+ gxf6 21.♕g3+.

20.c3 ♗e7



Exercise: How should White play now?

Show/Hide Solution

There are several good moves. It might appear natural to try to attack on the kingside. However, the strong ♘d5 can be considered as just one advantage; Fischer managed to create a second weakness, by means of a far-from-obvious move. What was it?

Answer:

21.♖a1!

Spassky commented: “This by no means obvious move is the simplest way of demonstrating that Black’s position is now completely hopeless.”

After the break on a4, Black’s queenside will be weak and White will find another invasion route.

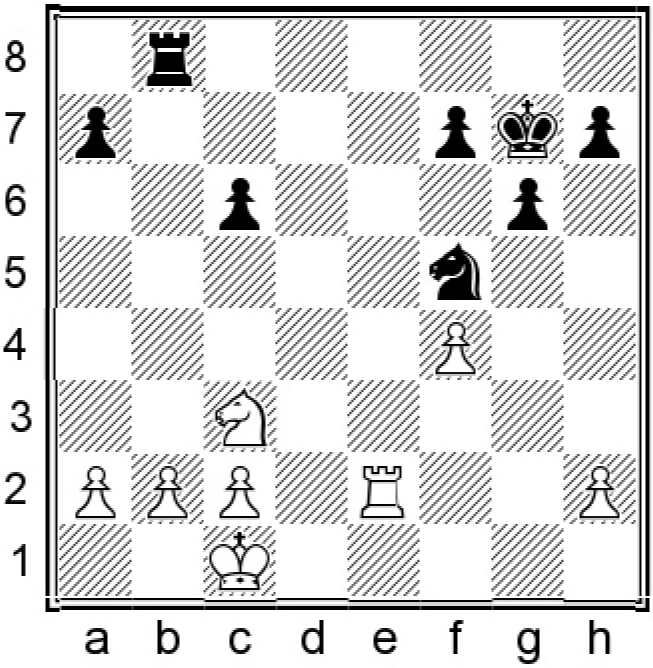
Question: Very surprising, indeed. How does a move like that occur to a master?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: In the same book Spassky relates how Bronstein asked Fischer how the rook move had occurred to him. Fischer replied, half-joking “Tal keeps moving his rook backward and forward. Why can’t I do the same?”.

On a more serious note though, it is possible that Fischer simply thought it up over the board, although another possibility is that he had seen the idea in some game or other, or in an analysis. Be that as it may, it has become part of our general chess knowledge in a more defined way and has been applied in situations quite dissimilar to this one.

Take, for instance, the game Comp Fritz 2 - Kasparov, Cologne 1992, where the following position arose:



Black to play

Here, instead of the natural 21...♖b4,

Kasparov played 21...♖h8!?, repeating the pattern of Fischer - Gadía.

The continuation was 22.b3 h5 23.♔b2 h4, (with the idea of 24...h3 and ...♖h4) 24.h3, and now, having provoked the weakening of g3, Black sought to exploit it with 24...♖d8 25.♘e4 ♘g3 26.♘xg3 hxg3 27.♖g2 ♖d4 28.♖xg3 ♖xf4 29.♖c3 ♖h4 30.♖xc6 ♖xh3 31.♖a6 g5, and the black pawns triumphed, 0–1 in 39 moves.

In this case the manoeuvre wasn't quite as strong, and it only worked against weak defence on White's part.

Let's get back to our game.

21...f6 22.a4

Now Black made a gross blunder which avoided an unpleasant defensive task, although in any case he had little possibility of saving the game.

22...♖b8??

Black had to play 22...bxa4 23.♖xa4 a5 when, as well as the tactical solution 24.♖xa5, it is possible to increase the pressure and retain the strong knight with 24.♖fa1! ♖c5 25.h3, and Black has no good defence; White threatens to play 26.♖xa5, as well as to advance the passed pawn with 26.b4, followed by b5-b6, etc., which could follow 25...♗f8 (26.b4), for instance.

23.♘xe7+

If 23...♕xe7 then 24.♕d5+.

1–0

The fight for first place between Spassky and Fischer continued right to the final round. Fischer had been one point behind Spassky since their game against each other. Fischer had caught up by half a point in the seventh round, when Spassky drew with Bronstein.

Game 15

"With a dog"

Towards the end of the chase, Fischer played against the Argentinean Carlos Incutto (1925 – 2000). This was in round 11; Spassky was in the lead with 9½ points out of 10, followed by Fischer with 9, then came Fridrik Olafsson with 7½ and David Bronstein and Osvaldo Bazán with 7, while Incutto had 4 points.

I had the opportunity to play Incutto several times myself, and in one of those tournaments I asked him about that game and what it had been like to play Fischer. At first he was embarrassed and was reluctant to tell me what happened. I didn't understand at all; I just wanted to learn about Fischer.

Seeing how puzzled I was, he told me that on the day of the game Fischer (only just 17, let's remember) approached a group of chessplayers. After exchanging a few words, they asked him who he was playing that day. Fischer did not notice that his opponent was there, and as he knew Argentinean chess terminology he replied "With a dog" ("Con un perro" is a way of saying with a weak player), and he left, confident of an easy win.

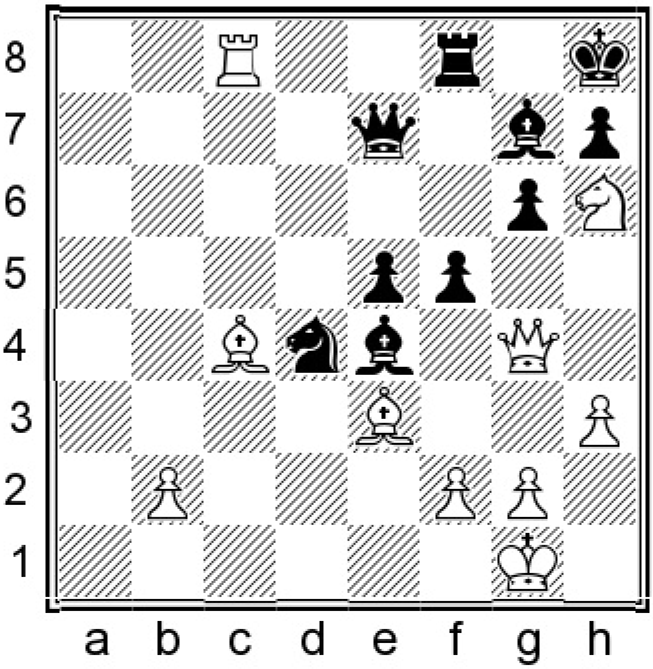
After Fischer said that, Alberto Foguelman (1923 – 2013), who was at the table, said to Incutto, encouraging him to play well in a curious fashion: "If you draw with him, I will kiss your backside!" Incutto was ashamed to talk about that "metaphor."

Let's look at the final part of that game.

Robert Fischer
Carlos Incutto
Ruy Lopez [C99]
Mar del Plata (11), 10.04.1960

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♘a5 10.♗c2 c5 11.d4 ♕c7 12.♘bd2 cxd4 13.cxd4 ♗b7 14.♘f1 ♖ac8 15.♗d3 ♘d7 16.♘e3 exd4 17.♘xd4 ♗f6

18.♘df5 g6 19.♘h6+ ♔h8 20.♘eg4 ♗g7 21.♗g5 ♘e5 22.♘xe5 dxe5 23.a4 ♘c4 24.♕e2 f6 25.♗c1 ♘a5 26.axb5 axb5 27.♗e3 ♘b3 28.♖a7 ♘d4 29.♕g4 ♖a8 30.♖xa8 ♗xa8 31.♖c1 ♕d6 32.♖c8 ♕e7 33.♗xb5 ♗xe4 34.♗c4 f5



White to play

After a complex struggle, in which Black was fine at various times, the players reached this position in which Fischer can gain some advantage.

Exercise: What should Fischer have played?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

35.♕g5?

This is a blunder which might have cost at least a half-point.

The right move was 35.♖xf8+, when it is risky to play 35...♕xf8 due to 36.♕h4 ♗f6 37.♗g5 ♗xg5 38.♕xg5 ♔g7 39.♘f7, so 35...♗xf8 seems preferable, e.g. 36.♕g5 ♔g7 37.♘f7 ♕xg5 38.♗xg5, when White wins a pawn, although realising it will not be simple.

Exercise: Why is Fischer’s move a mistake?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

35...♗f6?

Incutto misses his great opportunity.

35...♕xg5 was insufficient due to 36.♘f7+! ♔g8 37.♘xg5+ ♔h8 38.♘f7+ ♔g8 39.♘xe5+, and wins.

The right move was 35...♘f3+! 36.gxf3 ♕xg5+ (now this is with check) 37.♗xg5 ♖xc8 38.♘f7+ ♔g8 and none of the discoveries is of any benefit to White.

Fischer possibly would have drawn, but only after "suffering" somewhat, after for example 39.♗e6 ♖c6 40.♘d8+ ♖xe6 41.♘xe6 ♗xf3, or 39.♘xe5+ ♖xc4 40.♘xc4 ♗xf3.

36.♘f7+! ♔g8

On 36...♔g7 37.♕h6+ is decisive; 36...♕xf7 37.♗xf7 ♗xg5 38.♖xf8+ ♔g7 39.♖c8 was also insufficient to equalise.

37.♘xe5+ ♘e6

If 37...♔h8 then 38.♘xg6+ hxg6 39.♕h6+, followed by mate.

38.♘xg6! ♗xg5

Or 38...hxg6 39.♗xe6+.

39.♘xe7+ ♗xe7 40.♗h6! ♖xc8 41.♗xe6+ ♔h8 42.♗xc8

With two extra pawns the game is decided.

42...♗f6 43.b4 ♗d4 44.b5 ♗d3 45.♗d7 ♔g8 46.♗e8 ♗c4 47.g3 ♗d3 48.♗e3 ♗xe3 49.fxe3 ♔f8 50.b6 ♗e4 51.♗d7 ♔e7 52.♗xf5

1–0

Fischer won, but as we have seen, not very easily. When the game was over, Incutto said to Fischer, wagging his finger at him and looking him in the eye, "So, not dog," Fischer realised he had slipped up and said in horror, "No! No! No!".

In the end, the tournament finished with Fischer and Spassky drawing for first place. My teacher Bernardo Wexler drew with Spassky in the last round and Fischer finally caught up with him. I remember that Wexler used to say that he had had the better position, and Fischer encouraged him to offer a draw.

It is true that of the fifteen competitors only four were of the top level, but in order to catch up with Spassky, Fischer had to score 12½ points from the final 13 rounds.

The 150th Anniversary Tournament

Buenos Aires 1960

Frank Brady says in *Endgame: Bobby Fischer's Remarkable Rise and Fall* that of all the cities he went to Buenos Aires was his favourite: "He liked the food, the people's enthusiasm for chess, and the broad boulevards."

After the Mar del Plata tournament Fischer played for the first time in Buenos Aires in the "150th Anniversary Tournament," from the 23rd of June to the 23rd of July 1960.

It was a very strong tournament for the time, with fourteen grandmasters among the twenty competitors.

Mark Taimanov wrote in *Shakhmaty v. SSSR* that when he arrived he was surprised at the importance the local media gave to the tournament, which was "a great chess event. The newspapers were full of articles about the tournament, photos of the participants, and predictions."

The Clarín newspaper gave theirs: "The Soviet Union is the strongest chess-playing country in the world, Korchnoi is their champion, and therefore he must be the favourite."

Taimanov quoted what Fischer said in the first press conference, without false modesty, "I am the youngest player in the tournament, but I am also the strongest, I want to come first." Taimanov remembers that Samuel Reshevsky, Fischer's great opponent in the USA, commented that he would not mind coming 19th, as long as Fischer came 20th.

Fischer began with 2½ points out of 4. In the 5th round he tried at all costs to win an equal ending against Eliskases and lost. After two more draws he lost two games on the run, crushed by the Argentinean champion Bernardo Wexler and losing after serious mistakes against Wolfgang Uhlmann.

The lessons from Russian literature

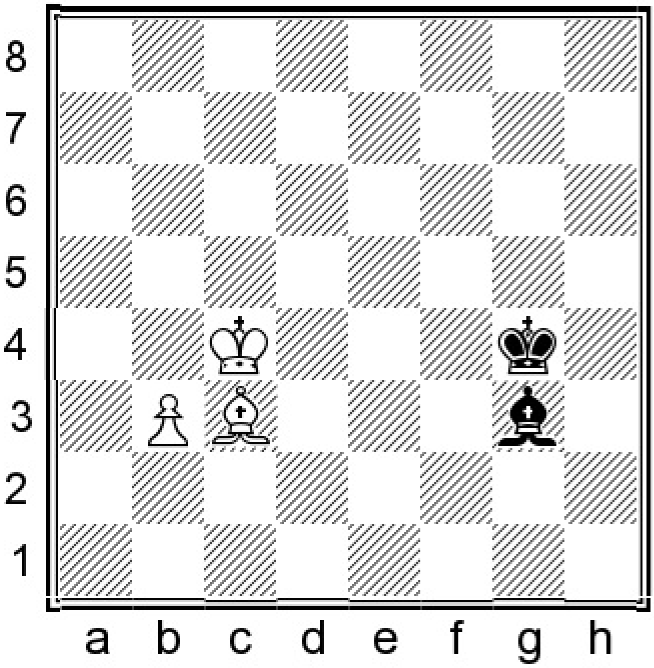
Mark Taimanov
Robert Fischer
150th Anniversary Tournament, Buenos Aires (9), 04.07.1960

In *Russians versus Fischer* they present the impressions of Soviet masters. This is what Mark Taimanov wrote: "I will never forget the impression of our first meeting. The day before, Bobby had lost and he was very upset. (...) At an embassy reception that evening he suddenly put on a brash display: 'That's it', said Bobby, 'no more failures. [Fischer had 3 points out of 8] I'm going to start winning tomorrow! Who am I playing? Taimanov? All the more reason!' Considering that I was standing beside him, this boastful statement was not very tactful. But to be honest, it was hard to imagine a better stimulus before our game: 'Well, Bobby, just you wait!".

"I played that game with great verve and endeavour", wrote Taimanov.

It was a complex Nimzo-Indian, and is analysed in depth in one of Dvoretsky's books. Taimanov had a big advantage for a good part of the game. He pushed as hard as he could and considered that he let the win slip away from him in time trouble.

Nobody thought that Fischer would be able to save his delicate position. He survived the middle game but even so the game was adjourned with Fischer a pawn down.



Black to move

“My colleagues bet me: ‘Bobby can’t save himself, it’s impossible, it needs such accuracy’. And, indeed, when the game was resumed, [apparently on move 42] one sensed that it was hard for Fischer to find the correct decisions and that he was teetering on the edge of an abyss. But then (...) Bobby suddenly began playing quickly and faultlessly, like a machine: he produced 15 almost forced moves within a minute.”

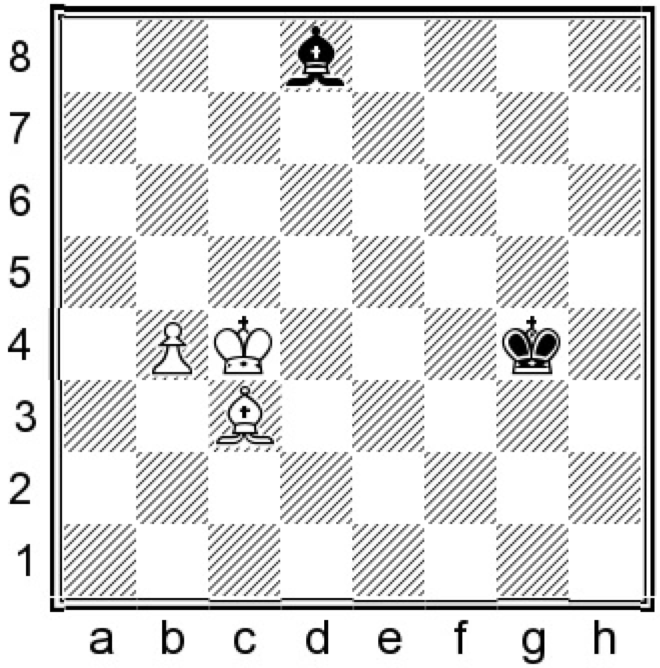
The game was drawn and an astounded Taimanov asked Fischer: ‘Bobby, how did you manage to find the saving path, and do it so quickly?’.

‘I didn’t have to do any thinking’, Fischer replied, beaming. ‘Seven years ago [In other words when Fischer was 10 years old!] your magazine *Shakhmaty v. SSSR* published a detailed analysis of this endgame (by Averbakh) and I was very familiar with all the variations.’

76...♗d6

First of all, the black bishop holds up the advance of the pawn. This is only temporary though, because the pawn will advance, but it will require the white monarch to go ahead to help his own bishop to dislodge the enemy prelate; this will create space for the black monarch to approach.

77.♔d5 ♗e7 78.♗d4 ♗b4 79.♔c4 ♗a5 80.♗c3 ♗d8 81.b4



After 81...♔f5 82.♔d5 we would reach the same position as in Capablanca - Janowski, New York 1916, where Black resigned, thinking that, as he is unable to approach with his king, the pawn is unstoppable, e.g. 82...♗b6 83.♗d4 ♗c7 84.b5 ♗d8 85.♔c6 ♔e6 86.♗b6 [The all-powerful engines of early 2021 tell us that this methodical move gives mate in 19 moves, but that 86.♗f2, 86.♗c5 and 86.♗g1 mate one move earlier] 86...♗g5 87.♗c7 ♗e3 88.♗d6! The bishop goes to c5 to ensure the advance of the pawn. 88...♗f2 89.♗c5 ♗g3 90.b6 ♗f4 91.b7 ♗g3 92.♗b6 ♗b8 93.♗c7 ♗a7, and now it's the turn of the king. 94.♔b5 ♔d7 95.♔a6, and wins.

But Averbakh showed that it was a draw, precisely with the manoeuvre that Fischer had learned.

Exercise: What did Fischer play here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

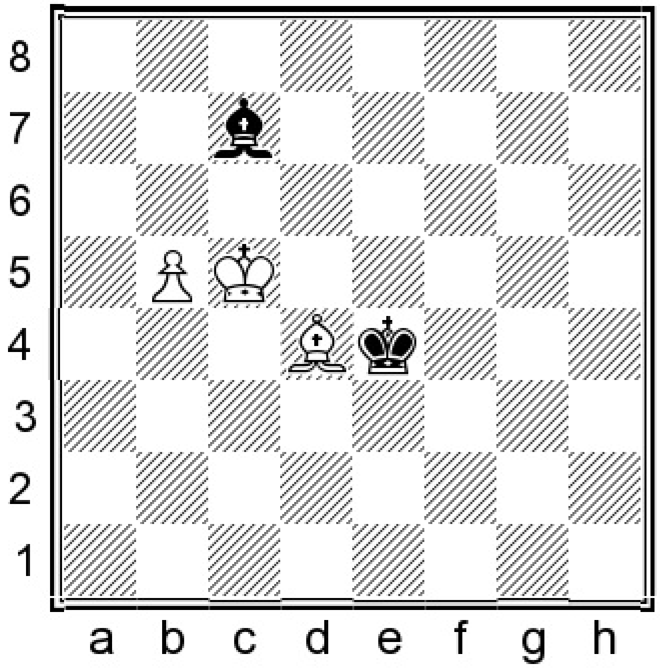
81...♔f4!

Averbakh pointed out the defence that Janowski overlooked. The king doesn't need to be in front of the pawn; it can also defend by attacking the pawn from behind. After 81...♔f5 82.♔d5 Black can draw by playing 82...♔f4! 83.♗e5+ ♔e3! 84.b5 ♔d3 85.♔c6 ♔c4!.

82.b5

If 82.♔d5 then 82...♔e3.

82...♔e4 83.♗d4 ♗c7 84.♔c5



Exercise (simple): How did Fischer proceed here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

84...♔d3!

Of course; having learned Averbakh’s method, it is simple, the king heads for c4.

85.♔c6 ♔c4! 86.♗b6 ♗g3

The king on c4 prevents White from being able to play ♗c5 at the right moment (which we saw in the previous line, with the black king badly placed on e6). Now though, after e.g. 87.♗c7 ♗f2, the black bishop is well placed and the pawn cannot advance without being captured.

87.♗a7 ♗c7!

½–½

Taimanov was impressed by Fischer’s “resourcefulness in defence and his encyclopaedic knowledge.” Nevertheless, after the tournament he wrote: “Fischer is too deeply convinced that he is a genius. (...) The young American champion is undoubtedly very talented, but his playing is not devoid of serious shortcomings.”

More than a decade later wrote from a different perspective: “I have to admit that, many years later, when I was drawn against Fischer in the World Championship Candidates Match, [in 1971 Fischer beat him 6 - 0], my memories of this game inspired me with a certain degree of optimism – after all, throughout the entire encounter the initiative had been on my side, and Fischer had gained a draw only with difficulty."

Game 16

The end of a disastrous tournament

In the 10th round Fischer drew with Reshevsky, and in the 11th he had an unfortunate accident against the German Wolfgang Unzicker, when he touched a pawn, intending to play ...h6. and on seeing that he would lose it, he then played it to h5, irreparably weakening his position.

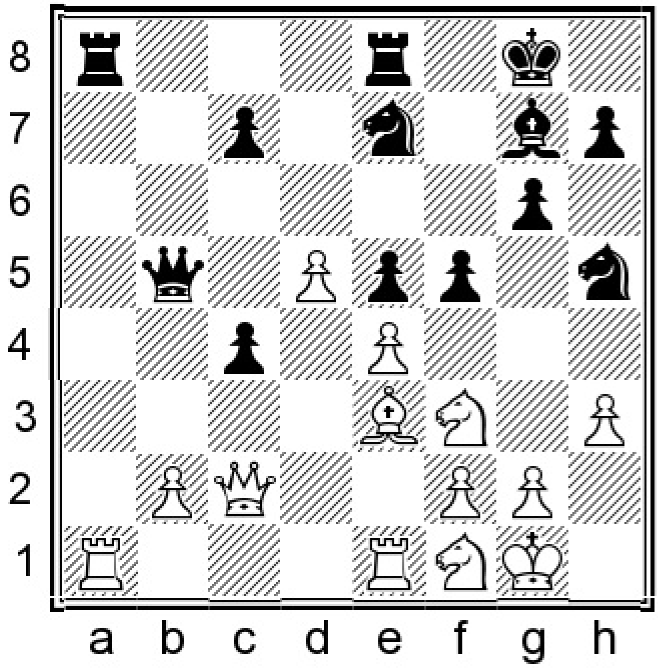
Unzicker, in the book *Bobby Fischer from genius to legend*, says, "Fischer demonstrated exemplary correctness. Having touched the pawn he moved it, following the touch-move rule, even if it was a losing move for him. I had no intention of protesting if Fischer had moved a different piece. It would have been difficult for me to prove that he had broken the rule, and besides, I did not like to have recourse to the arbiter in such cases. Fischer lost the game because of a moment of blindness and because of his honesty, which led to my winning. It has never given me any pleasure."

Out of the last eight games Fischer won two, suffered another defeat, and drew five times. He shared 13th to 16th place with 8½ points out of 19. It was a total disaster.

Let's look at his win in the penultimate round.

Robert Fischer
Robert Wade
Ruy Lopez [C92]
150th Anniversary Tournament, Buenos Aires (18), 19.07.1960

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 0-0 8.c3 d6 9.h3 ♕d7 10.d4 ♖e8 11.♘bd2 ♗f8 12.d5 ♘e7 13.♘f1 g6 14.c4 ♗g7 15.c5 ♘h5 16.a4 dxc5 17.axb5 ♗b7 18.bxa6 ♗xa6 19.♗e3 c4 20.♗a4 ♗b5 21.♗xb5 ♕xb5 22.♕c2 f5



White to move

Black’s structure, with doubled pawns on the c-file, is weak, and the isolation of the c4 pawn is quite serious, although that is not the only important factor in the position.

Exercise: What did Fischer play here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23.♖xa8

The first step; with this exchange he not only deflects the remaining black rook, but also keeps his own rook on a useful square.

23...♖xa8

Exercise: What plan did Fischer choose?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24.g4

Question: Now that’s a surprise, opening up the position of his own king. Is it best?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes, Fischer took a surprising decision; it is very difficult to know what’s best here.

White cannot exploit the weakness of c4 immediately (if 24.♘3d2? then 24...f4) but this is something that might be important in the future.

The engines prefer 24.♗g5 here, and after the forced 24...fxe4 White has a slight advantage with practically any of the three options 25.♘xe5, 25.♖xe4 or 25.♕xe4; after this last move the continuation might be 25...♘xd5 26.♘e3 ♘b6 27.♖d1, with reasonable compensation for the pawn, as the black pieces are badly coordinated, whereas White’s are very active.

With the move in the game, “Fischer fights for control of the light squares,” wrote Karsten Müller; Fischer must have considered that the weakness of his kingside would not be relevant.

24...fxe4

In the event of 24...fxg4 25.hxg4 ♘f4 (25...♘f6 26.g5 is similar) as Black no longer has ...f4 available, White can simply play 26.♘3d2.

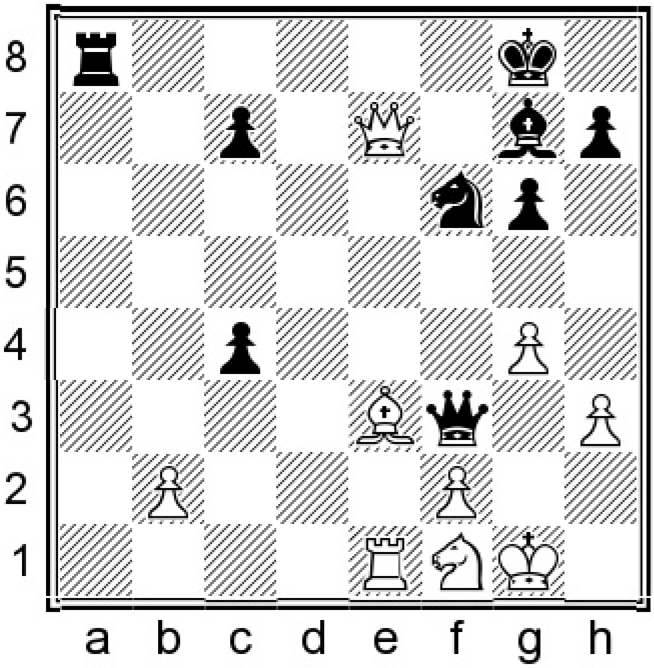
The engines prefer the “unhuman” move 26.♗xf4!, opening the long diagonal, but after e.g. 26...exf4 27.♘1d2 ♕xb2 28.♕xc4 ♕c3 29.♕b5 (threatening ♕d7) 29...♖d8 30.♔g2, or first 30.g5, the black pieces are very clumsily placed and White can prepare to invade with his rook and knights, with advantage.

25.♕xe4 ♘f6 26.♕xe5 ♕xd5

Logically Black seeks counterplay by keeping the queens on the board.

Objectively this might not be best; the engines prefer to try to hold the ending a pawn down after 26...♘exd5 27.♕e6+ ♔h8 28.♘e5 ♕e8 29.♕xe8+ ♖xe8 30.♘xc4 h5, which offers practical chances of a draw, but who would want to play this voluntarily?

27.♕xe7 ♕xf3



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

28.♕e6+!

It’s important to displace the black king before White’s next move. The immediate 28.♗d4? is weak due to 28...♖e8.

28...♔h8 29.♗d4 ♖f8

Of course not 29...♖e8? due to 30.♕xe8+.

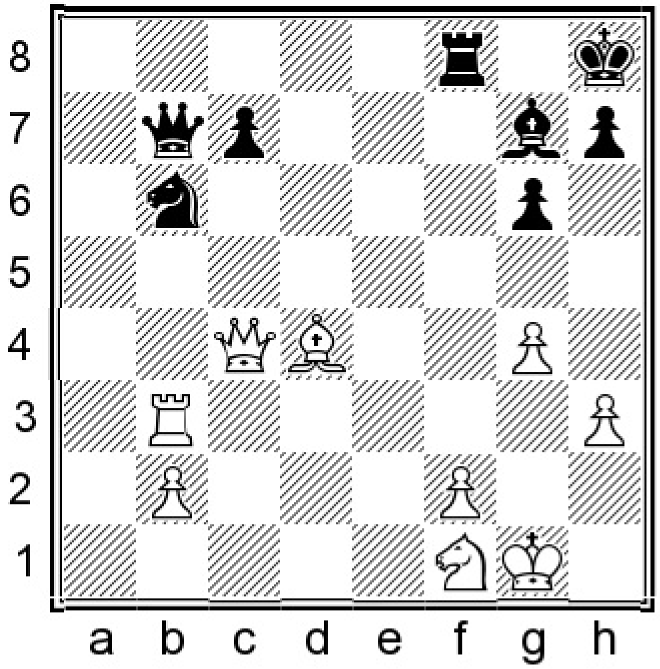
30.♖e3

White has defended his h3-pawn, while preserving the harmony of his forces. Meanwhile the pawn on c4 cannot be held.

30...♕b7

The c4-pawn can’t be defended with 30...♕d5?, since this loses to 31.♗xf6 ♕xe6 32.♗xg7+.

31.♕xc4 ♘d5 32.♖b3 ♘b6



Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

33.♗xg7+!

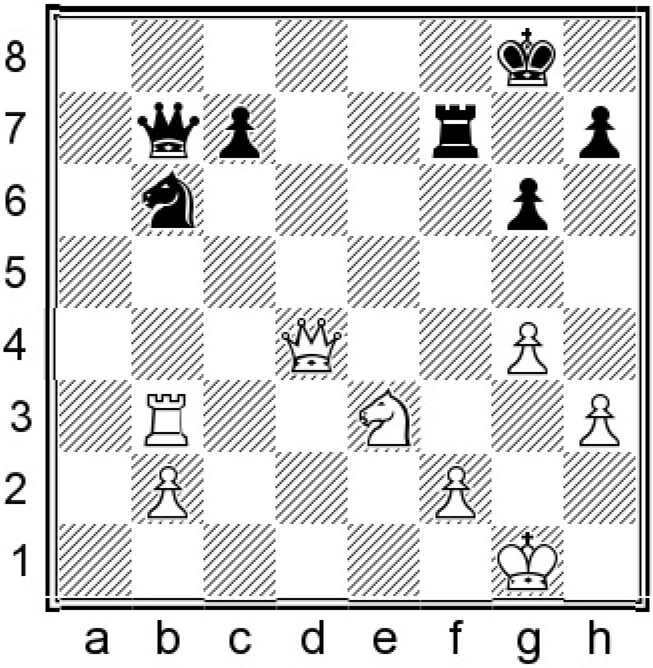
Once again we see Capablanca's influence; White "clears the dead wood from the position," in other words he simplifies, in order to be able to place his pieces on good squares.

The engines prefer to maintain the tension playing e.g. 33.♕c5, which threatens ♕xf8++ or 33.♕b4.

33...♔xg7 34.♕d4+ ♔g8 35.♘e3

Now White has all three pieces in dominating positions.

35...♖f7



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

36.g5!

Preparing the deadly entry of his knight on f6 or h6, via g4.

36...h5!? 37.♖d3

37.gxh6 ♕f3 38.♕h4 ♔h7 is also good for White, but less simple; Fischer wants more.

37...♕f3??

Attacking two pawns, but...

37...♖d7 was also hopeless due to 38.♕e5!, and in the event of 38...♖xd3 White regains the rook with a timely ♕xg6+, e.g. 39.♕e6+ ♔g7 40.♕f6+ ♔h7 41.♕f7+ ♔h8 42.♕f8+ ♔h7 43.♕h6+ and finally 44.♕xg6+.

37...♕a8 was the most tenacious, although White's advantage is obvious.

Exercise: How did Fischer refute Black's move?

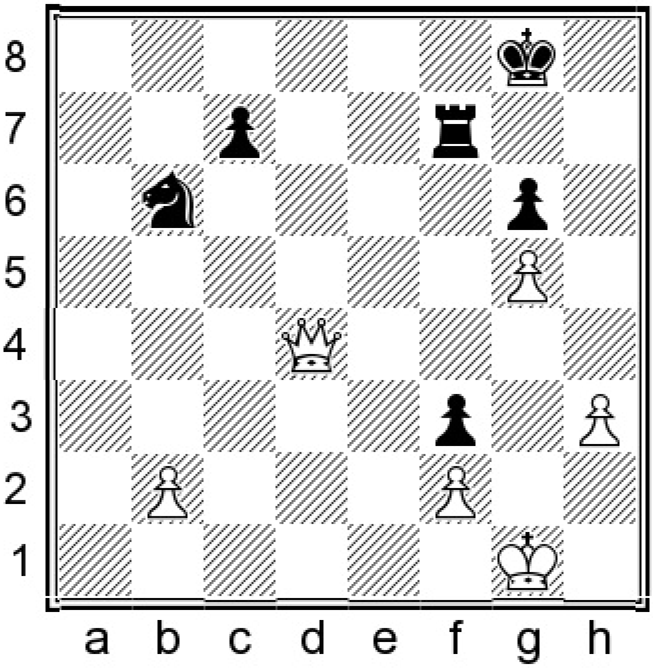
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

38.♘g4!

The knight threatens to accomplish its plan of embedding itself in the black position.

38...hxg4 39.♖xf3 gxf3



40.♕e4

Question: White has gained a material advantage, but it will not be easy to convert this, will it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: In reality, yes; it might take time, but in addition to Black’s weaknesses on f3 and c7, which restrict Black’s defence, the knight is temporarily out of play.

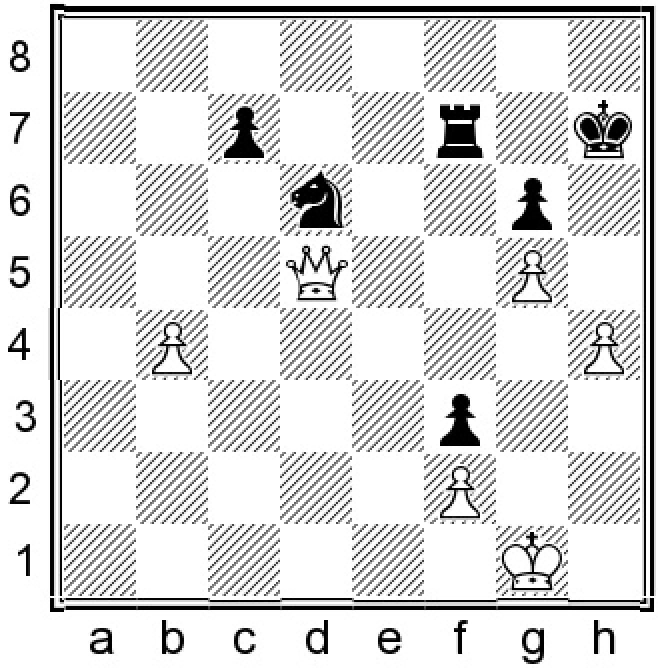
Also White has a majority on the kingside which cannot be blockaded and which, after suitable preparation, will create a passed pawn which at the same time will be a strong attacking element.

40...♔g7 41.♕e5+ ♔g8 42.h4 ♔h7 43.b4 ♘c4

The knight wants to participate in the struggle, but will soon be worse-off. .

43...♔g8 44.♔h2 ♔h7 45.♔g3, followed by a timely h5, would not have saved Black either.

44.♕d5 ♘d6



Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

45.b5!

With the threat of 46.b6, which prompted Black to resign.

Here's a plausible continuation: 45...♖f5 46.♕c6 ♘xb5 47.♕d7+ ♔g8 48.♕e8+ ♔h7 (or 48...♔g7 49.♕e7+ ♖f7 50.♕e5+) 49.♕e7+ ♔g8 50.h5!, and White wins by attack.

1–0

Getting back to Fischer's disastrous tournament, what was the reason for the worst and almost the only failure in his entire career?

It seems that Najdorf, who was not playing because after being there for the opening rounds he went off to Venezuela on business, was somewhat "to blame" for this.

Brady relates that "the rumor that circulated, both then and for years after, was that he was staying up until dawn—on at least one occasion with an Argentinean beauty - allowing himself to become physically run-down, and not preparing for the next day's opponent. The worldly Argentinean grandmaster Miguel Najdorf, who wasn't playing in the tournament, introduced Bobby to the city's nightlife..."

Fischer, at the age of 17, believed he had enough energy for everything, "even after very little sleep, night after night. Unfortunately, when he found himself in extremis at the board and called on his chess muse to save him, there was no answer," added Brady.

There are other versions which hold Larry Evans more responsible for bringing Fischer to this state of nocturnal exhaustion, while according to Taimanov Fischer himself put his bad result down to the poor lighting in the playing room.

In any case Fischer never again committed this "sin of youth"; during tournaments and matches he took part in later he always maintained an extremely professional approach.

Game 17

A "book" combination

In his first Olympiad, in Leipzig in 1960, Fischer played on the top board for the USA and scored 13 points out of 18. The USA won the silver medal, behind the USSR.

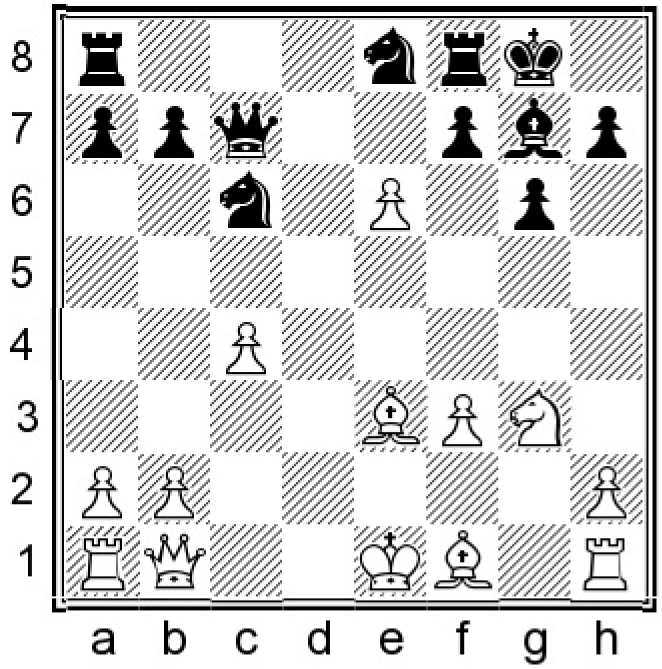
Let us not forget that there he played one of his best-known games, where Fischer played combinatively in a manner more typical of Mikhail Tal.

Let's look just at the finish of this game

.

René Letelier
Robert Fischer
King's Indian Defence [E70]
Leipzig Olympiad, Preliminary Group D (8), 24.10.1960

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 0-0 5.e5 ♘e8 6.f4 d6 7.♗e3 c5 8.dxc5 ♘c6 9.cxd6 exd6 10.♘e4 ♗f5 11.♘g3 ♗e6 12.♘f3 ♕c7 13.♕b1 dxe5 14.f5 e4 15.fxe6 exf3 16.gxf3



Black to move

White wanted to depart from theory very quickly and he succeeded in doing so, but at a very high price: a delay in development and several weaknesses.

What he wants to do is get the king to safety before the black pieces “wake up.”

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16...f5!

Postponing the recapture of the pawn in favour of keeping the e-file open; the threat is 17...f4.

17.f4 ♘f6

Now the knight makes way for the inactive rook, at the same time eyeing the weakness on g4.

18.♗e2 ♖fe8 19.♔f2 ♖xe6

Black has regained his pawn with almost all his pieces active.

20.♖e1 ♖ae8

And now all Black’s pieces are indeed in play.

21.♗f3

Exercise: Do you remember how Fischer finished off the game?

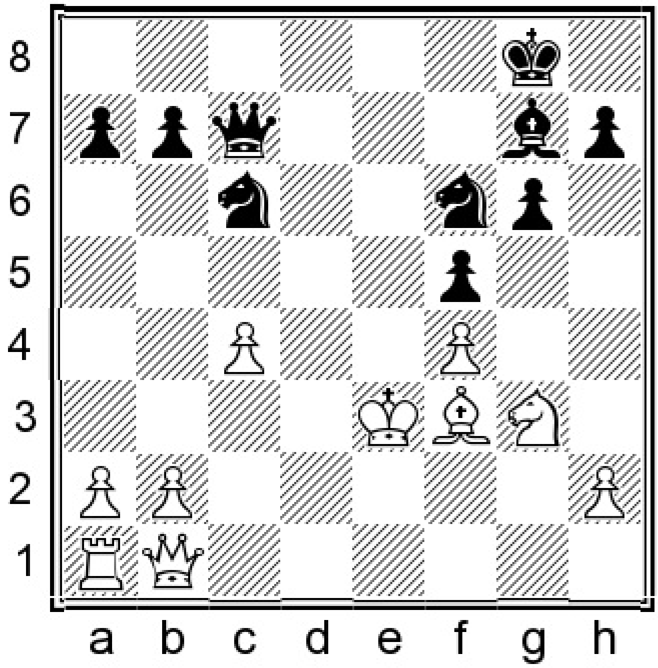
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21...♖xe3!

A ‘book’ sacrifice, to draw out the white king.

22.♖xe3 ♖xe3 23.♔xe3



Exercise: And now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23...♕xf4+!!

24.♔xf4 loses to 24...♗h6++, while after 24.♔f2 ♘g4+ 25.♔g2 ♘e3+ 26.♔f2 ♘d4 27.♕h1 ♘g4+ 28.♔f1 ♘xf3 Black wins material and has an unstoppable mating attack.

0–1

Game 18

Quirks that the machines did not understand

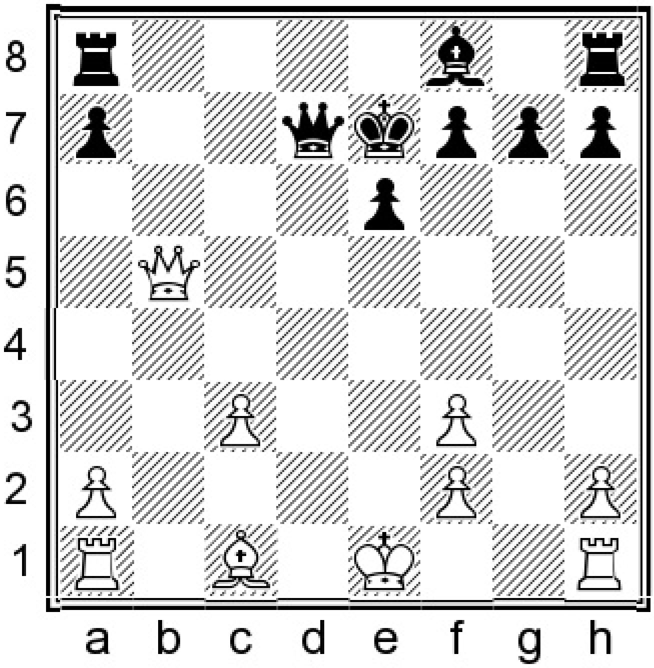
Fischer had already played two games against the former World Champion and future President of FIDE, Max Euwe, in 1956; this was his third and final game against him and with it he evened the score.

In this game Fischer took a decision which was surprising at that time, an exception to the general rules. Fischer commented at the time that those little quirks were difficult for machines to understand.

That was true fifty years ago, when he published it in *My 60 Memorable Games*, and it remained valid for many years after, but it's no longer the case; for the current engines Fischer's move is their first choice.

Robert Fischer
Max Euwe
Caro-Kann Defence [B13]
Leipzig Olympiad, Final A (7), 03.11.1960

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.c4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♘f3 ♗g4 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♕b3 ♗xf3 9.gxf3 e6 10.♕xb7 ♘xd4 11.♗b5+ ♘xb5 12.♕c6+ ♔e7 13.♕xb5 ♘xc3 14.bxc3 ♕d7



White to move

Two things stand out from the start: the fact that the black king has lost the right to castle, and White’s disastrous pawn structure.

Exercise: What did Fischer play?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

15.♖b1!

Fischer wrote that this had been suggested by Pal Benko.

Question: Yes, this is indeed surprising. Wasn’t it better to keep the queen on and try to attack the king?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: White isn’t seeking to attack the black king, not because he wouldn’t have liked to do so, but because it has no possibility of success.

For example, 15.♕a6 can be answered with 15...♕c8, or more ambitiously with 15...f6, intending ...♔f7, and then if 16.♖b1 simply 16...♖c8.

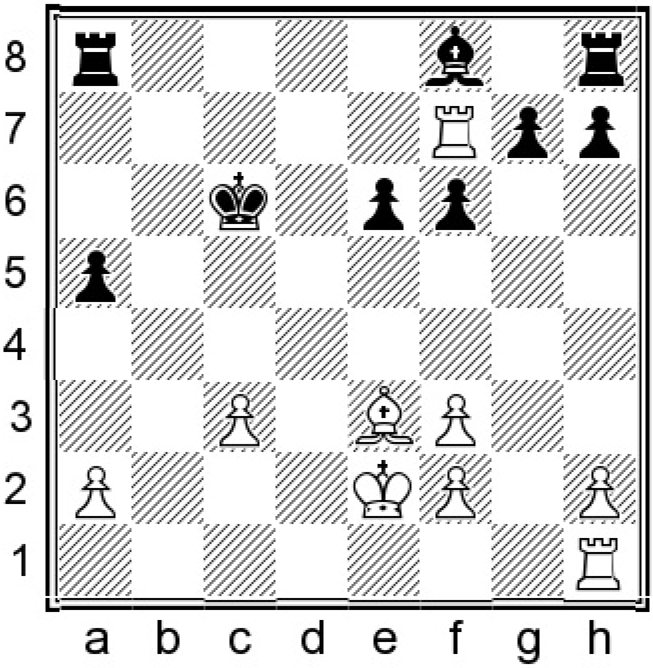
The surprising thing is that White gladly enters an endgame, even though every single one of his five pawns is isolated. The reason is that the activity that White obtains makes these weaknesses irrelevant for a long time.

In particular Black has problems bringing his h8-rook into play.

15...♖d8?

Euwe thought that he needed to defend his second rank, but soon Fischer will demonstrate that this plan has a serious drawback.

Fischer commented that Black’s position was also difficult after 15...♕xb5 16.♖xb5 ♔d6! 17.♖b7 f6 18.♔e2 ♔c6 19.♖f7 a5 20.♗e3, with a lasting advantage.



Nevertheless, this was preferable to the game continuation. In this position Black can play 20...♖b8!, with the idea of ...♖b2+, preventing White from activating both his rooks; after 21.♖d1 ♖b2+ 22.♖d2 Black would exchange rooks and then bring his two passive pieces into play; White is slightly better, but Black has good chances of defence.

16.♗e3 ♕xb5 17.♖xb5 ♖d7

Exercise: Black has carried out his initial idea; how did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18.♔e2

Preparing to bring the h1-rook into play. Fischer indicated that 18.♖a5?! wasn't appropriate, since the a-pawn won't escape and White will capture it in better circumstances. Black could continue with 18...♔f6 and after 19.♖xa7? ♖xa7 20.♗xa7 ♗d6, with the idea of ...♖a8, Black isn't worse.

18...f6

Exercise: How did Fischer continue now?

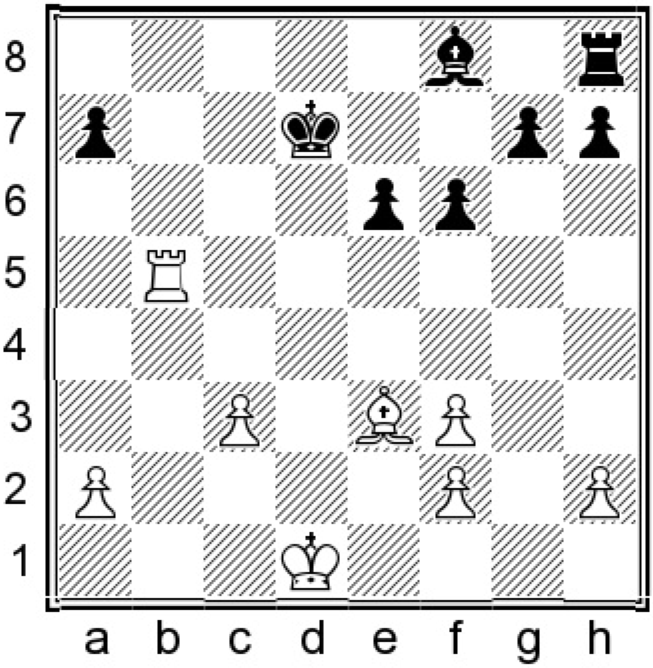
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19.♖d1!

Exchanging the only active black piece; this is simpler than the good alternative 19.♖hb1, seeking to activate both rooks.

19...♖xd1 20.♔xd1 ♔d7



Here the pieces are placed more favourably to White than after the exchange of rooks mentioned in the note after the previous diagram.

Exercise: Fischer will now demonstrate this, by highlighting one of the snags of 15...♖d8. What do you think he played?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21.♖b8!

Occupying Black's abandoned back rank and preventing the development of the bishop; now there is a threat of 22.♗c5.

Fischer rightly continues to postpone the capture of the a-pawn; after 21.♗xa7?! ♗d6 22.♖b7+ ♔c6 23.♖xg7 ♗xh2 it would be very difficult to win, e.g. 24.♗d4 ♗f4! 25.♗xf6 ♖a8, with great activity and good drawing chances.

Kasparov wrote that 21.♖b7+ ♔c6 22.♖xa7 was also very advantageous, but it is quite possible that over the board he would have played in the same way as Fischer, since this is much clearer.

21...♔c6 22.♗xa7

Finally, under ideal conditions, with Black's pieces still imprisoned.

22...g5

This is the only way to be able to develop.

Exercise (simple): Here Fischer continued once again with the simplest and strongest move. What was it?

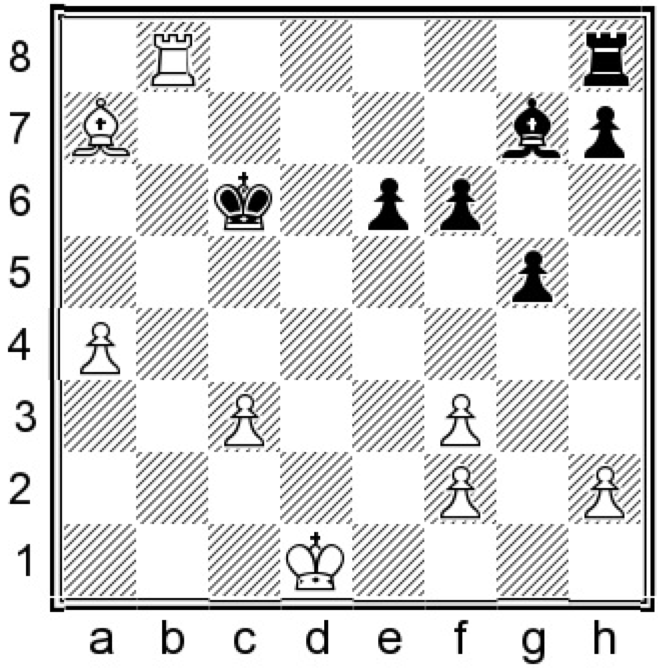
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23.a4

Of course, "passed pawns must be pushed."

23...♗g7



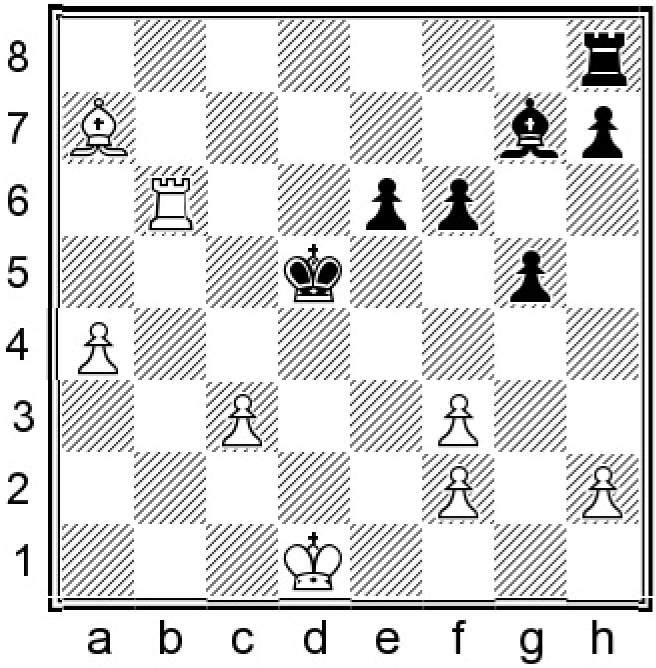
24.♖b6+!

Question: Really? Is this not a deviation from the simplest way? Wouldn't it be easier just to exchange rooks?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Well, yes; during the game Fischer naturally considered 24.♖xh8 ♗xh8 25.♗d4, with good chances of victory, but he wanted to see whether he could achieve more without exchanging rooks.

24...♔d5 25.♖b7 ♗f8 26.♖b8 ♗g7 27.♖b5+ ♔c6 28.♖b6+ ♔d5



29.a5!

Question: Fischer decided to keep the rooks on; now the black rook can be activated, so was this best?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Fischer assessed that it was possible to allow the black rook to come into play, since his passed pawn is very strong and the two white pieces will coordinate perfectly to support its advance.

29...f5

29...♖a8 was not to be feared due to 30.♖b7; Müller commented that this was nevertheless the most tenacious defence, continuing 30...♗h8 31.♖xh7 f5, but instead of capturing the h7-pawn White can prepare the advance of his other passed pawn e.g. with 31.♖c7 f5 32.♗b6, followed by c4, or by activating the king first with 31.♔c2!.

Exercise: What had Fischer planned?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

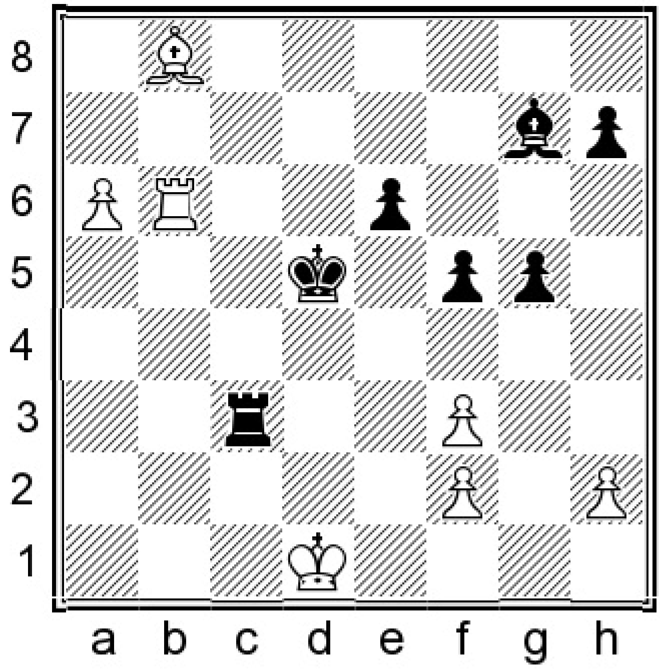
30.♗b8!

Ensuring the advance of the a-pawn; the threat is to win with 31.a6.

30...♖c8

The rook seeks to get behind the passed pawn.

31.a6 ♖xc3



32.♖b5+

Of course not 32.a7? due to 32...♖a3, followed by ...♗d4.

Exercise: The text move wins, but Kasparov was surprised that Fischer didn’t play, or mention later, a quicker way. What was it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: White can win more rapidly with 32.♖d6+! ♔c5 33.♖d7, attacking the bishop and also threatening to exchange rooks with 34.♖c7+.

32...♔c4

Fischer commented that after the game Euwe showed him a hidden trap in the line 32...♔c6 33.♖a5 ♗d4; Euwe asked him what he would have played, and Fischer thought for a few seconds and chose 34.♗e5?

Exercise: Euwe "almost fainted when I fell into it!," wrote Fischer. What was Euwe's refutation of this move?

Show/Hide Solution

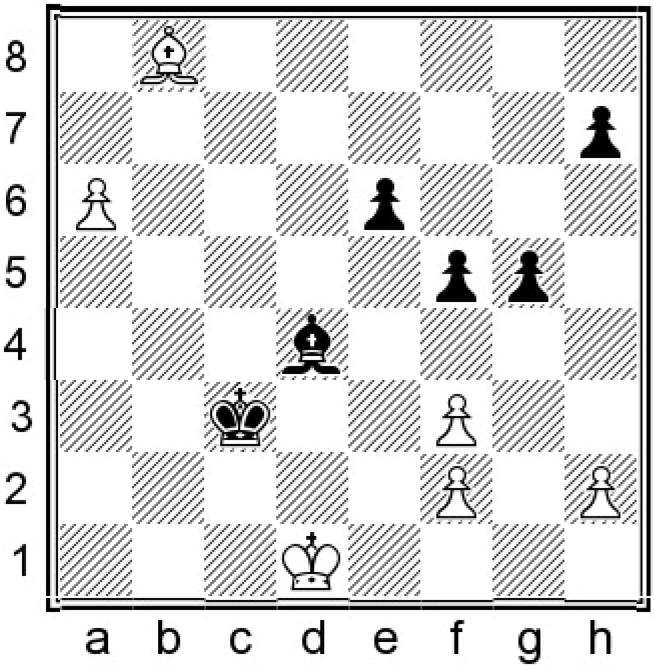
Answer: With 34...♖c5! Black can draw, e.g. if 35.♖a4 ♖xe5 36.♖xd4 then 36...♖a5.

After looking again, Fischer saw a winning line: 34.♔e2!; Kasparov later analysed the long line that confirms this and also indicated that it was simpler to play 34.a7 ♗xa7 35.♖xa7 ♖xf3 36.♔e2 ♖h3 37.♔f1 and win with the extra piece.

33.♖b7!

Here too the double threat is decisive.

33...♗d4 34.♖c7+ ♔d3 35.♖xc3+ ♔xc3



Exercise (simple): How did Fischer force his opponent to resign?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

36.♗e5!

1–0

Game 19

Playing on the edge of the abyss

Fischer reached the final round of the 1960-61 US Championship with a two-points lead, in other words, with first place already guaranteed.

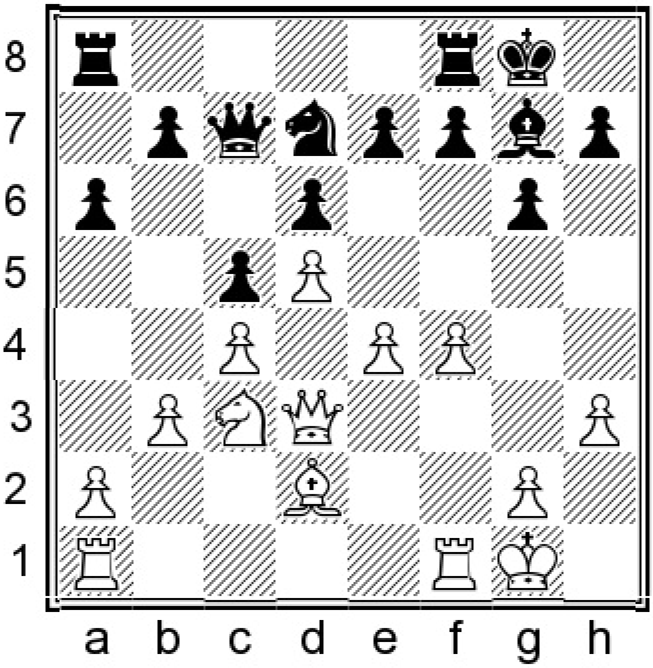
Without having seen the results table, nobody would have doubted that Fischer needed to win at all costs; he took huge risks, sacrificed material and at one moment his position was dubious. But over the board it was very difficult to resist Fischer’s continuous attacks, exerting, as Kramnik pointed out, extreme pressure with no let-up.

Bisguier had managed to defeat Fischer the first time they played, in 1956, but in the next fourteen games he was only able to take half a point off Fischer.

Arthur Bisguier
Robert Fischer
King’s Indian Defence [E90]

US Championship, New York (11), 03.01.1961

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.♘f3 0-0 5.♗f4 c5 6.d5 d6 7.e4 ♕a5 8.♗d3 ♗g4 9.0-0 ♘bd7 10.h3 ♗xf3 11.♕xf3 ♘e5 12.♕e2 ♘xd3 13.♕xd3 a6 14.♗d2 ♘d7 15.b3 ♕c7 16.f4



Black to move

The structure is that of a Benoni. White usually plays in the centre and on the kingside and Black on the queenside.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

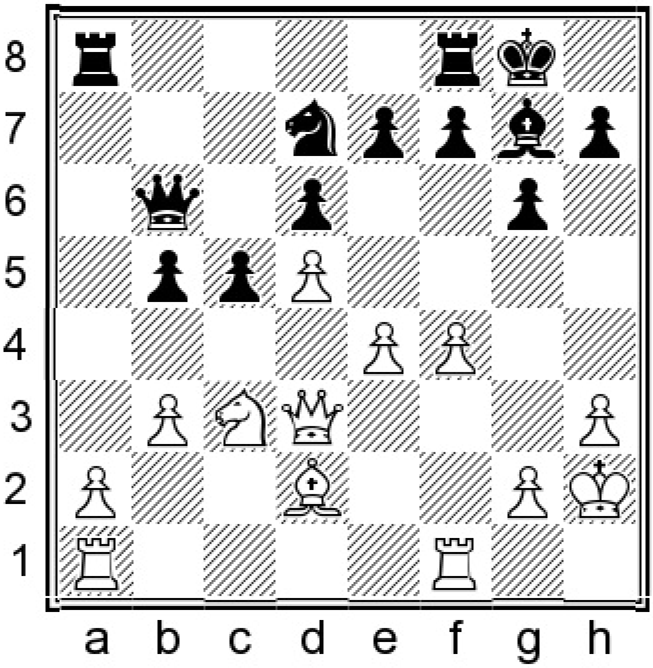
16...b5!

Black needs to hurry; the preparatory 16...♖fb8? allows 17.a4 suppressing all counterplay, while White would continue with the e5-break in mind.

17.cxb5 ♕b6

17...♖fc8! was another, more computer-like possibility, with the idea of replying to 18.bxa6?! with 18...c4! after 19.bxc4 ♕b6+ 20.♔h2 ♕xa6, when Black captures the pawn on c4 with strong pressure on the queenside, as in the Benko Gambit.

18.♔h2 axb5



19.♘xb5!

Bisguier is up to the task; this exchange sacrifice is the only way to hold the position. 19.♖ae1? allows Black to make progress with 19...b4 (or 19...♖a3) 20.♘a4 ♕a6 21.♕xa6 ♖xa6 22.♖e3 ♖fa8, followed by ...♘b6, and Black is much better; 19.♖ac1 ♖a3 is also unpleasant.

19...♗xa1 20.♖xa1 ♖fc8

20...f5 was the main alternative, but Fischer's move is more consistent with the idea of making progress on the queenside.

21.♕c4 ♕a6

The queen makes way for the knight.

22.a4 ♘b6 23.♕c2

Exercise: How did Black continue?

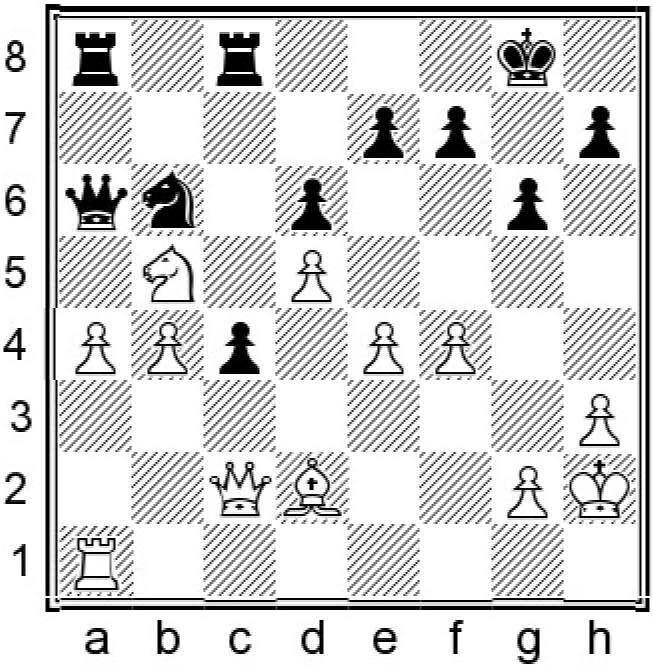
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23...c4!

This is almost forced; White was ready to play 24.♗c3, nullifying Black's activity.

24.b4



Exercise: What is the logical continuation of Fischer's plan?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24...c3!

An attractive sacrifice, enabling Black to penetrate the White camp; this is the point of Fischer's idea, but obviously it involves risks, given that for the time being White will have two connected passed pawns.

Not 24...♘xa4? due to 25.♘c3, and wins.

25.♘xc3!

25.♗xc3? loses to 25...♘xa4.

25...♕c4 26.b5 ♕d4

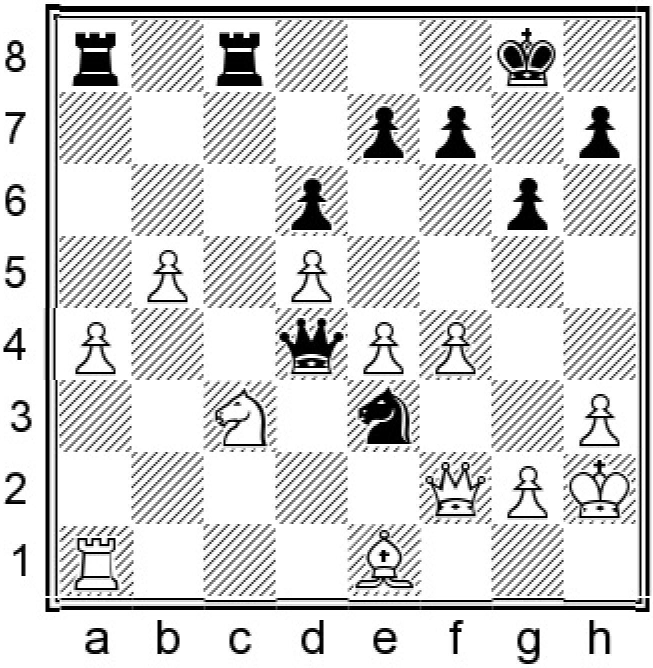
Making way for the knight.

27.♗e1!

White anticipates Black’s knight move and makes a move which will soon be forced anyway, in order to retain more options.

27...♘c4 28.♕f2 ♘e3

It was possible to play 28...♕xf2 29.♗xf2 ♘a5, followed by ...♖c4 and/or ...♔f8, with the plan of bringing the monarch to the queenside; this was good enough for equality, but Fischer wants more, so risks more.



29.♖d1?

The constant pressure exerted by Fischer starts to tell.

Instead, 29.♖c1! would have forced Black to play extremely precisely to equalise; the threat is 30.a5 ♖xa5? 31.♘e2, and wins.

After 29...♕d3 30.♕f3 (30.b6 ♖cb8 31.♘e2, with the threat ♖c3, giving up the e4-pawn in order to play a5, is the alternative, but it’s not clearly better) Black must choose between 30...f5 and 30...♖xa4, leading to great complications where White isn’t worse.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29...♕xc3!

Winning material; nevertheless, the strength of the white pawns means that the balance of the position is not yet decisively disturbed.

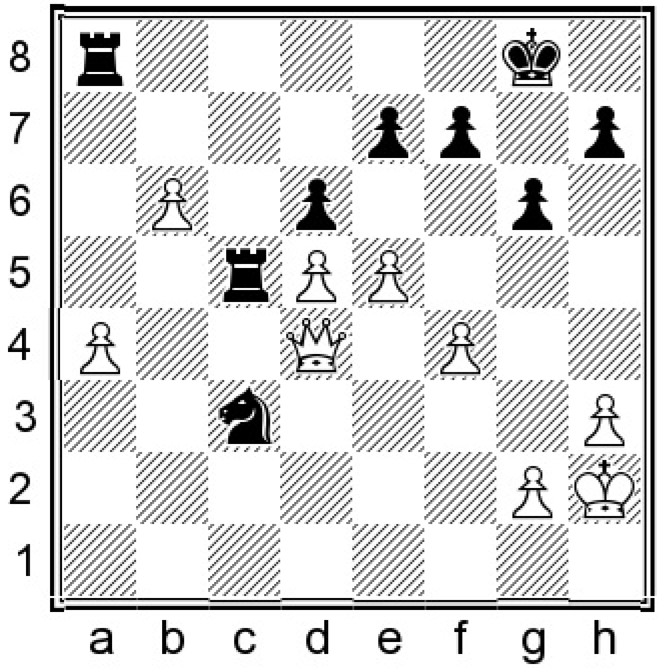
30.♗xc3 ♘xd1 31.♕d4

31.♕h4! was good enough to keep White in the game, e.g. 31...♘xc3 32.♕xe7 ♖d8 (or 32...♘xa4 33.♕xd6) 33.b6 ♘xa4 34.b7 ♖ab8 35.e5.

31...♘xc3 32.b6 ♖c5 33.e5?

And finally the collapse comes.

The queenside pawns might possibly have been enough for equality after 33.♕b4! ♖xa4 34.♕b3 ♖a8 35.b7 ♖b8 36.♕b6 ♖b5 37.♕c7 ♖8xb7 38.♕xc3 ♖c5 (or 38...f6 39.♕c8+ ♔g7 40.h4 ♖b2 41.e5) 39.♕a1 and although only Black can hope to make progress, he seems unable to activate his rooks due to the weakness of his monarch.



Exercise (simple): How did Fischer refute White's move?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

33...♖xa4!

It's that simple; Black captures one of the passed pawns, while neutralising the other.

34.b7

Or 34.♕d2 ♖b4.

34...♖xd4 35.b8=♕+ ♔g7 36.exd6 exd6 37.♕xd6 ♖cxd5

And Black has a decisive advantage.

38.♕c7 ♘e2 39.f5 ♖xf5 40.♕a7 ♖fd5 41.♕a1 ♘f4

0–1

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1962

Game 20

Learning from the classics

In this game Fischer departed from his sharpest defences, the King’s Indian and the Grünfeld and chose the Queen’s Gambit Declined, which he used less frequently, quite aware that it allows drawish lines, but he commented that he took that risk because first place in the tournament was already guaranteed.

A “hanging pawns” structure was reached and Fischer achieved a resounding win from an apparently harmless position.

Fischer once commented that he had read more than 1,000 books. For this game, which is a model from the black viewpoint, displaying sharp and accurate play, it is likely that he was helped by his knowledge of the classic games featuring this structure, such as Rubinstein - Nimzowitsch, Karlsbad 1907 and Bernstein - Capablanca Moscow 1914, among others.

Mario Bertok
Robert Fischer
Queen’s Gambit [D59]
Stockholm Interzonal (22), 04.03.1962

1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗e7

Question: I don’t play this line, but I know that there is a reason for developing this bishop before the g8-knight. Could you remind me what it is?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: In many cases, including this one, it simply amounts to a transposition of moves, but this move order designed to avoid line of the Queen’s Gambit Exchange Variation where White develops the king’s knight to e2, which could arise for example after 3...♘f6 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗g5 ♗e7 6.e3 0-0 7.♗d3, followed by 8.♘ge2.

4.♘f3

White makes no attempt to exploit Black's move order and goes into the main line. The alternative, played even in matches for the world title between Botvinnik and Petrosian and then between Karpov and Kasparov, is 4.cxd5 exd5 5.♗f4.

4...♘f6 5.♗g5 0-0 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 b6

Fischer reached this position of the Tartakower variation on four occasions, including one with the white pieces which is often considered the best game of the 1972 Spassky - Fischer match in Reykjavik 1972.

8.cxd5

Fischer considered that this was best, opening the c-file and preparing ♖c1, with pressure against the black c-pawn.

Years later it became more popular to continue developing without changing the structure, e.g. with 8.♗d3, a line that Fischer also faced, in Petrosian - Fischer, Candidates Tournament, Belgrade 1959.

8...♘xd5

Fischer commented that after playing ...h6 it isn't so appropriate to play 8...exd5.

Question: Why is that?

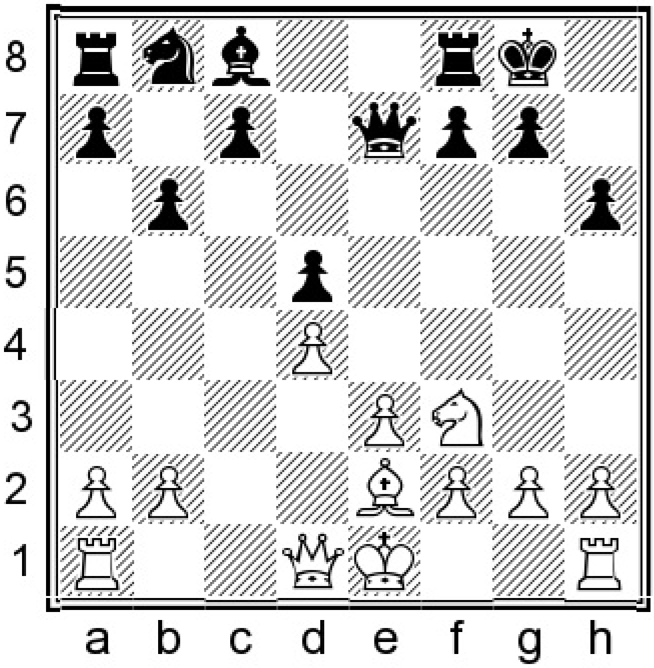
Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Because White can use the formation employed by Pillsbury; after 9.♗d3 ♗b7 White continues with 10.♘e5, followed by f4, with a dangerous initiative on the kingside. Here this would be favourable to White, because the black kingside is weaker after playing ...h6, and also because it might allow a timely g4–g5 break.

Fischer emphasised that this line is only playable for Black with the pawn on h7.

9.♗xe7 ♕xe7 10.♘xd5 exd5 11.♗e2

It is more ambitious to play 11.♖c1 first, as Fischer himself played against Spassky.



Exercise: What did Fischer play here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

11...♗e6!

This is now the best square for the bishop, rather than b7. This is because Black needs the b-file for his major pieces, in the event that White plays dxc5 after Black's planned ...c5.

12.0-0 c5 13.dxc5?!

Question: Creating hanging pawns is one of White ideas, with the plan of attacking them, so why is this move dubious?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes, exchanging on c5 is always an option to consider; what makes it good or bad is the timing.

It is necessary to evaluate whether it is possible to attack the hanging pawns advantageously, or whether, as in this case, the exchange gives Black's too much freedom and White's pressure isn't so effective.

Fischer even gave this move a question mark and indicated that it was better to play 13.♘e5, employed by Spassky and Larsen, among others. Black can then play 13...♘d7, with equality, but not 13...c4?! due to 14.b3, and Black has to exchange on b3, since 14...b5? is bad due to 15.a4.

Subsequently Larsen showed a preference for 13.♕d2, with good results, but not due to the opening.

13...bxc5 14.♕a4

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

14...♕b7!

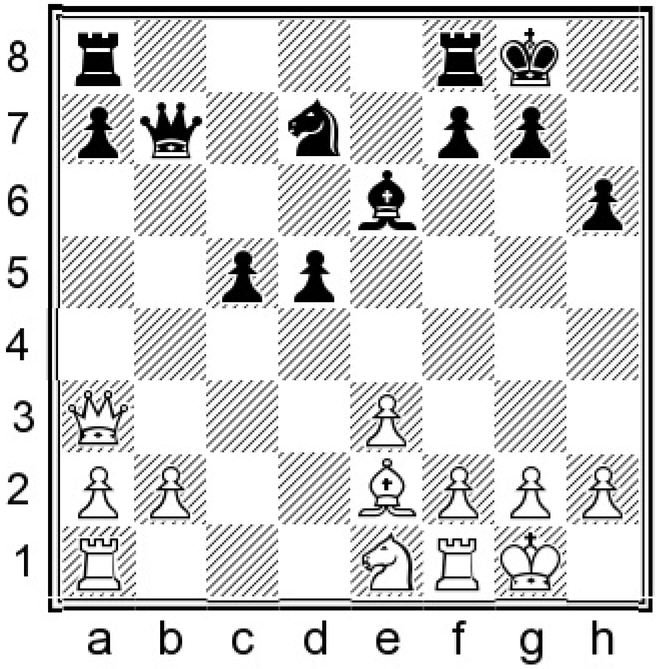
Instead of developing the b8-knight Fischer first occupies the b-file, putting pressure on the b2-pawn, exploiting the exchange 13.dxc5.

15.♕a3 ♘d7 16.♘e1?!

"What else is there? Black's centre is well protected, and he is ready to assume the queenside initiative," wrote Fischer.

With this regrouping of the knight, White plans to deploy it on d3, to attack the c5-pawn and perhaps going to f4.

But everything indicates that White already should have been thinking about restraining Black's play. Instead of to playing actively, it was preferable first to play 16.♗a6, followed by 17.♖fd1.



Exercise: How did Black continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16...a5!

This is what 16.♗a6 would have prevented. Now Black plans ...♕b4, and White's position, albeit slowly, continues to deteriorate.

17.♘d3

Exercise: How to make progress now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17...c4!

Just as in Capablanca's game, although under better conditions. Black concedes squares, but gains space and increases his pressure on b2. Meanwhile, White is unable to take advantage of Black having given up control of the d4-square.

18.♘f4 ♖fb8 19.♖ab1?

White's game is becoming difficult, but this passive move isn't the most tenacious.

The suggestion of 19.e4 is no better, since instead of 19...dxe4? 20.♘xe6 fxe6 21.♗xc4 Black has the stronger move 19...♕xb2! and after 20.♕xb2 ♖xb2 21.exd5 ♗f5! Black's passed pawn is very strong; there is a threat of 22...g5, while 22.♗xc4 loses to 22...♖b4 23.♖fc1 ♘b6.

Also the c-pawn is decisive in the event of 19.♗f3 ♘f6 20.♖fd1 ♕xb2 21.♕xb2 ♖xb2 22.♘xd5 ♘xd5 23.♗xd5 ♗xd5 24.♖xd5 c3! 25.♖dd1 (if 25.♖c5 then 25...c2 26.♖c1 ♖d8, and wins) 25...c2 26.♖dc1 ♖ab8 27.♔f1 ♖b1 28.♔e2 ♖xa1 29.♖xa1 ♖b1, also winning. (Fischer).

Also insufficient is 19.♘xe6 fxe6 20.♗g4 ♖a6! 21.b3!?, and now, in the event of 21...cxb3 22.axb3 ♕xb3 23.♕e7 ♘f8 24.♖a3, White has good drawing chances. (Fischer.) However, rather than taking the pawn, it seems better to play 21...♕b4!, preventing ♕e7, and the white position is difficult after either 22.♕xb4 axb4 or 22.♕b2 c3.

Perhaps the best way to obtain practical chances was to play the immediate 19.b3, leaving the bishop on e2, putting pressure on c4, and thus defending against 19...♕b4, in view of 20.♕xb4, when 20...axb4 loses the c4-pawn. Instead, after 19...cxb3 20.axb3 ♕xb3 White can play 21.♕e7, seeking to complicate the game, although the black position remains preferable, as the a5-pawn will be important once the position clarifies, e.g. 21...♕b4 22.♘xd5 ♗xd5 23.♕xd7 ♗e6.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

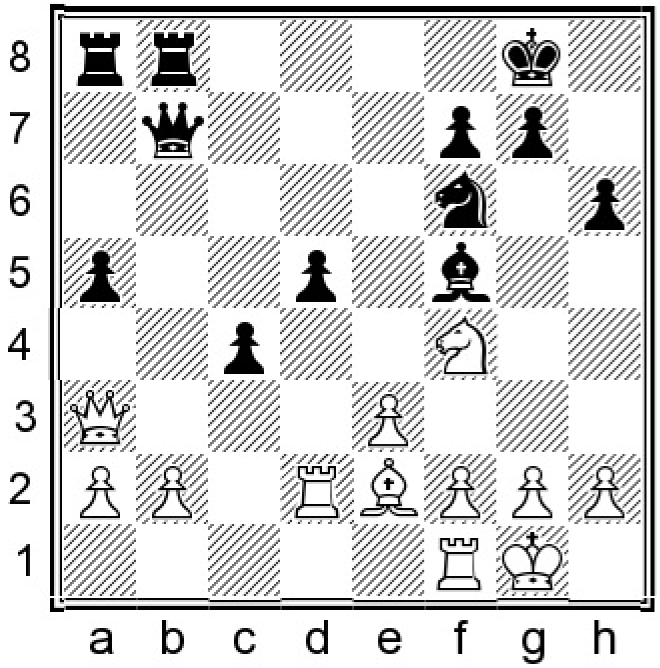
Answer:

19...♗f5!

At first sight, this attack on the rook allows it to improve its position, since instead of being passive on b1 it is able to head for the more active d2-square; however, it will soon be apparent that the improvement is illusory.

20.♖bd1 ♘f6 21.♖d2

White was relying on this. Fischer showed once again the power of the passed pawn after 21.♗f3 ♕xb2 22.♕xb2 ♖xb2 23.♘xd5 ♘xd5 24.♗xd5 (or 24.♖xd5 ♗e6 25.♖c5 ♖c8! 26.♖xa5 c3 27.♖c1 c2 28.♗e4 ♖b1! 29.♖xb1 cxb1=♕+ and mate) 24...♖c8 25.e4 ♗e6! 26.♗xe6 fxe6 27.a4 c3 28.♖c1 c2 "and White, completely tied up, must lose material."



Exercise: How did Fischer conclude the game?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21...g5!

Winning material.

22.♘xd5

In the event of 22.♘h5 we see the negative side of having the rook on d2: Black can play 22...♘e4 23.♖c2 ♕b4, and there is no good defence, for instance after 24.f3 Black wins with the elegant move 24...♘g3.

22...♘xd5 23.♗xc4

It is not possible to exploit the pin with 23.♗f3? due to 23...♗d3.

23...♗e6

“Black has some temporary discomfort but it’s only a matter of time before he consolidates and wins with his extra piece.” (Fischer).

24.♖fd1

Fischer indicated that the most tenacious continuation was 24.♗xd5 ♗xd5 25.f3, but of course there would be no chance of saving the game. Instead of 25.f3, 25.♕d6 ♗xg2 26.♕xh6 is also hopeless due to 26...♖a6!.

Exercise (simple): The move played worsens the white position; why?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24...♘xe3!

This wins another pawn due to the threat of 25...♕xg2++.

25.♕xe3 ♗xc4 26.h4 ♖e8 27.♕g3 ♕e7 28.b3 ♗e6 29.f4

Exercise (simple): How can Black extinguish the glimmer of white counterplay?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29...g4!

Closing the g-file and removing any hope.

30.h5 ♕c5+ 31.♖f2 ♗f5

0–1

Game 21

First “Dragonicide” in Varna

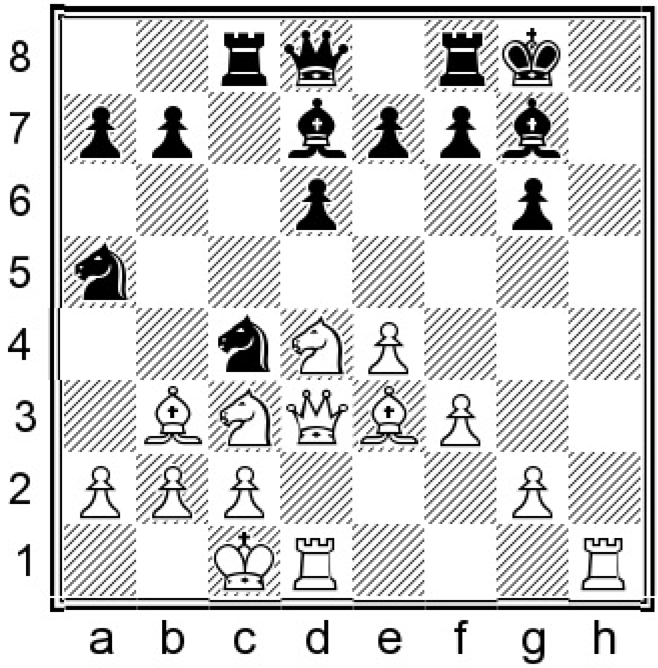
In the 1960 Leipzig Olympiad Fischer was surprisingly defeated by the Ecuadorian César Muñoz.

Muñoz played nothing less than the Dragon Variation and for once Fischer was unable to apply his “recipe.” But he did manage this twice in the 1962 Varna Olympiad, where his first win occurred in the very first round.

Robert Fischer
Sharav Purevzhav
Sicilian Defence [B77]

Varna Olympiad, Preliminary Group B, (1), 16.09.1962

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 g6 6.♗e3 ♗g7 7.f3 ♘c6 8.♕d2 0-0 9.♗c4 ♘d7 10.0-0-0 ♘b6 11.♗b3 ♘a5 12.♕d3 ♗d7 13.h4 ♖c8 14.h5 ♘bc4 15.hxg6 hxg6



White to move

White has made better progress than Black in this attacking race with the kings castled on opposite sides.

Black has several pieces on the queenside, but his greatest triumph seems to be having neutralised the strong bishop on b3.

Fischer, on the other hand, has already carried out the first part of his “patented” manoeuvre, opening the h file. Now he needs to complete his recipe by giving mate.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16.♗h6!

There is nothing more logical than to eliminate the best defender of the castled position.

The engines prefer the slightly surprising 16.♗g5, without abandoning the idea of a future ♗h6.

Question: 16.♗g5 – what a strange move! How can you explain it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: All will be revealed in the next note.

16...e6?

Controlling d5, but very passive.

Of course 16...♗xh6+ would help White's invasion along the h-file, e.g. 17.♖xh6 e5 18.♖dh1, when if 18...exd4 then 19.♖h8+ ♔g7 20.♕xd4+ ♘e5 21.♖1h7+ ♔f6 22.♕xd6+ with a quick mate.

In the event of 18...♕g5+ 19.♔b1 exd4 20.♘d5, 20...♕xh6 is forced.

Here's the **Answer** to your question about 16.♗g5: the engines don't want to prevent 16...e6 but to avoid Black's only chance which consists of playing 16...e5! 17.♗xg7 ♔xg7 18.♘de2 b5, although after 19.♘d5 White still has the advantage.

Instead of 18...b5, it is worse to play 18...♕g5+ (with the idea of including the queen in the defence) in view of 19.♔b1 b5 (or 19...♗e6), and now 20.g3!, with the idea of 21.f4, and Black cannot defend his kingside and the pawn on d6 at the same time, e.g. 20...♖h8 21.♖xh8 ♖xh8 22.♗xc4 ♘xc4 23.b3.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

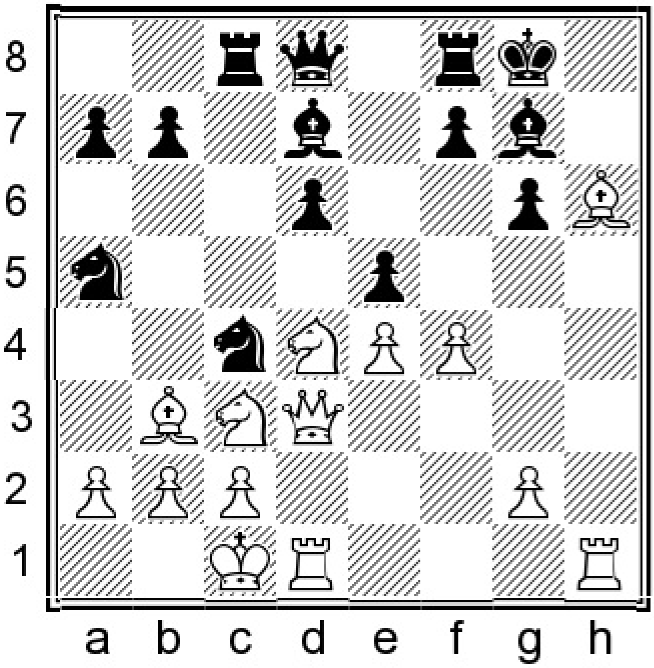
Answer:

17.f4!

Of course, preparing the entry of the queen along the h-file with 18.♕h3.

17...e5

17...♗xh6 18.♖xh6 ♕f6 doesn't work; White simply defends his attacked pawn with 19.♘de2 and Black is defenceless.



Exercise: There are several good moves here; which is the most effective?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18.♘f5!

Of course, continuing the attack, on the principle of “always forward,” although 18.♘de2, planning 19.♕g3, followed by f5 or ♕h2, was also effective.

As a demonstration of the power of the white position it is sufficient to mention that simply doubling rooks with 18.♖h2 gives White a decisive advantage, according to the engines.

18...♗xf5

Instead, 18...gxf5 allows a mating attack with 19.♕g3 ♕f6 20.♘d5.

19.exf5 ♘xb2

This fails, but there was no good defence against the threat of 20.♕h3.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

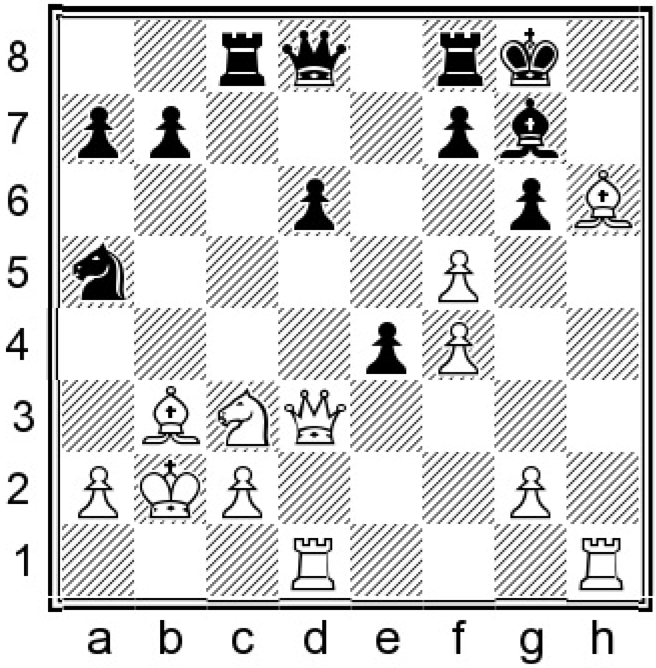
20.♔xb2

After the direct 20.♕h3 Black could play 20...♖xc3, but once again White can show the power of the h-file attack by playing the cool 21.♕h2!, e.g. 21...♘xb3+ 22.axb3 and if 22...♘xd1 then 23.♗xg7, soon forcing mate.

Of course this would be a computer decision, not human.

Instead, Fischer cooperates with Black's plan, because he has already seen a suitable reply to Black's next move.

20...e4



Exercise (simple): How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21.♗xg7!

The quickest, since 21...exd3 loses to 22.f6 followed by mate.

21...♔xg7 22.♘xe4

1–0

Game 22

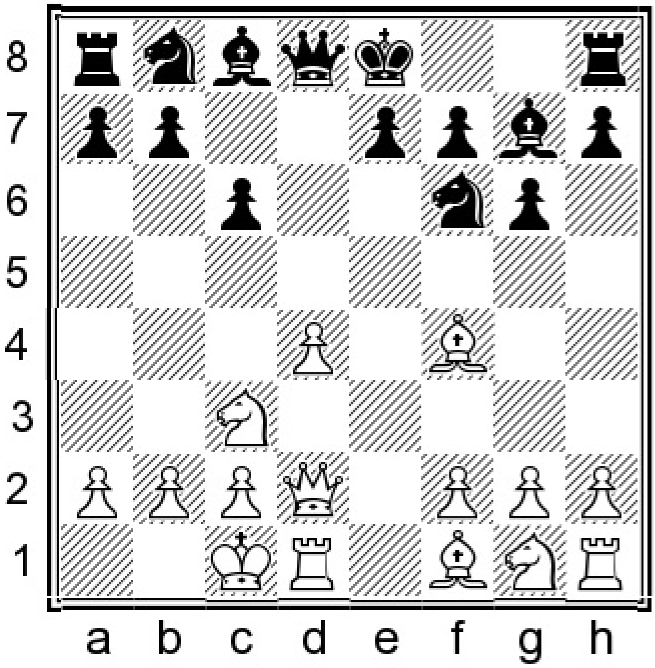
Second “Dragonicide” in Varna

The second game we will look at is not really against a Dragon Variation, but there are great similarities.

This is a clear case of the usefulness of knowing “something about everything”; ideas from one position, or plans from one particular middlegame type, can be helpful to us in dealing with other positions, although of course they will usually need to be adapted according to the circumstances.

Robert Fischer
Karl Robatsch
Scandinavian Defence [B01]
Varna Olympiad, Final A (4), 30.09.1962

1.e4 d5 2.exd5 ♕xd5 3.♘c3 ♕d8 4.d4 g6 5.♗f4 ♗g7 6.♕d2 ♘f6 7.0-0-0 c6



White to move

The position arose from a Scandinavian Defence, but it bears a certain similarity to Game 21 and to others that we have looked at earlier. White has an advantage in development.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer try to exploit his temporary superiority?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

8.♗h6!

We have seen that this recipe, the exchange of the fianchettoed bishop, is generally favourable, to try to exploit the weaknesses that are created in the black position.

8...0-0?

Once White has managed to neutralise the best defender of Black’s castled position, the g7-bishop, this move is very risky.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

9.h4!

Now the similarity with the Dragon is much greater. The black king is a clear target and White’s attack develops almost unhindered.

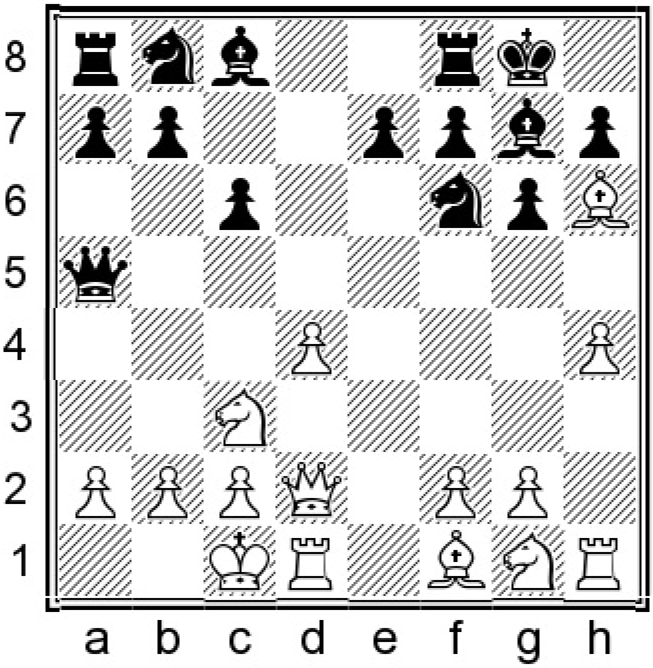
It will become clear that Black ought to have gradually prepared queenside castling by playing 8...♗xh6! 9.♕xh6 ♗e6, or 9...♗f5.

9...♕a5?!

Black tries to control h5 and dreams of counterattack against the white monarch.

9...♕d6 was another try, at least hindering 10.h5 in view of 10...♗xh6 11.♕xh6 ♘xh5, threatening ...♕f4+, but instead White can play 10.♗e2, for example.

9...e5 is no better; White would continue with his development by playing 10.♘f3, relying on the fact that the opening of the game should be favourable due to his greater activity.



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

10.h5!

“The attack plays itself. My experience with this line dates back to the Dragon-slaying days,” commented Fischer; the following notes in inverted commas are also by him.

10...gxh5

“Horrible, but Black must keep the rook’s file closed, one way or another.”

If 10...♖d8 11.hxg6 fxg6 the quickest way might be 12.♗c4+ e6 13.♗xg7 ♔xg7 14.♕h6+ ♔g8 15.♘e4, although there are other very strong continuations, such as 12.♗xg7 ♔xg7 13.♕h6+ ♔g8 14.♘e4 (14.♘f3 is also good) 14...♘xe4 15.♕xh7+ ♔f8 16.♕h8+ ♔f7 17.♗c4+.

If 10...♘xh5 then 11.♗e2 ♘f6 12.♗xg7 ♔xg7, and White exploits the opening of the h-file by playing 13.♕h6+ ♔g8 14.g4! (indicated by Fischer; 14.♘f3 is also effective) 14...♖d8 15.g5 ♘h5 16.♗xh5 gxh5 17.♖xh5 ♗f5 (or 17...♕f5 18.g6! ♕xg6 19.♖g5) 18.g6! wins.

Finally, if 10...♗f5 then 11.♗xg7 ♔xg7 12.f3, or immediately 11.f3 (threatening g4) 11...♗xh6 (if 11...gxh5? then 12.♕g5) 12.♕xh6 gxh5 13.♕g5+ ♔h8 14.♗d3, and wins a piece.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

11.♗d3

“It’s important to exclude Black’s bishop from f5,” (11...♗f5? loses to 12.♕g5), and furthermore this bishop aims straight at Black’s kingside.

11...♘bd7 12.♘ge2

“Taking advantage of the lull to bring out the reserves.” 12.♘f3 was the alternative.

12...♖d8

Exercise: How should White continue the attack?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13.g4!

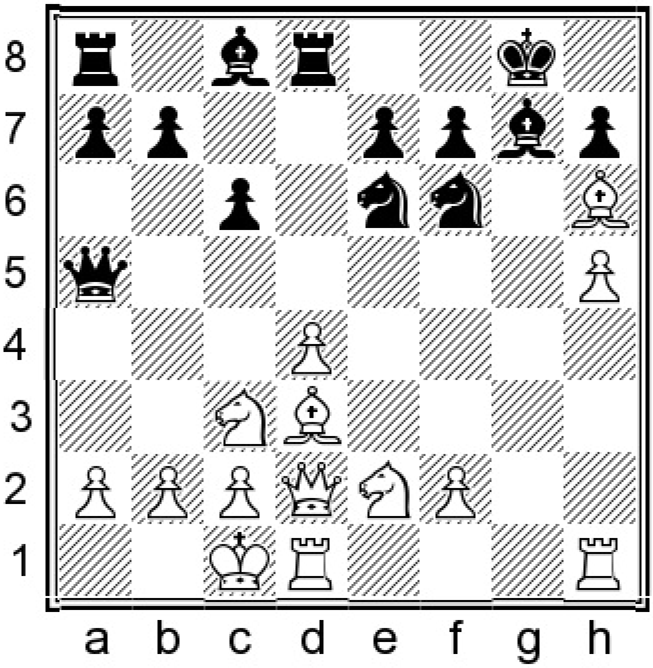
Opening more lines without letup.

13...♘f8

“Black hopes to hang on by clustering minor pieces around his king.”

If 13...♘xg4 then 14.♖dg1! “threatening both f3 and/or ♖xg4+, wins at least a piece”; White could also opt for 14.♗xg7 ♔xg7 15.f3, and the attack is unstoppable.

14.gxh5 ♘e6



Exercise (simple): How did the attack continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

15.♖dg1

So simple, justifying Fischer’s comment: “Now the open king knight’s file becomes the new base of operations.”

15...♔h8

If 15...♔f8 the quickest way to win is 16.♖xg7 ♘xg7 17.♖g1.

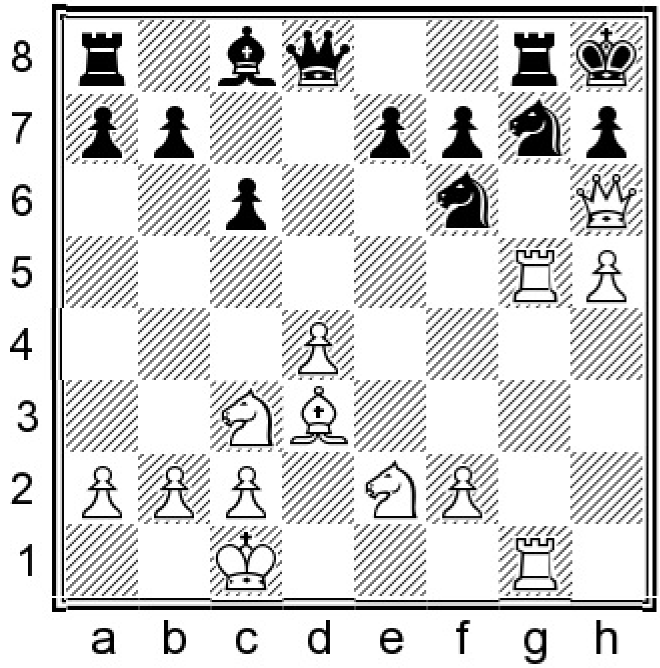
16.♗xg7+ ♘xg7 17.♕h6 ♖g8

If 17...♘e6 then 18.♘f4 and there is no good defence, e.g. 18...♖g8 19.♖xg8+ ♔xg8 20.♖g1+.

18.♖g5 ♕d8

If 18...♘f5 then 19.♖xg8+ ♘xg8 20.♕f8, with the idea of ♖g1.

19.♖hg1



The tremendous concentration of attacking forces against Black’s kingside means that Black has no defence.

19...♘f5

“Blundering a piece. But Black is completely tied up, and it’s a pity he didn’t allow the prettier finish after 19...♕f8 20.d5! ♗d7 (if 20...cxd5 21.♘xd5 ♘xd5 22.♕xh7++) 21.d6! ♘f5 22.♕xf8 ♖axf8 (or 22...♖gxf8 23.♗xf5 h6 24.dxe7 ♖fb8 25.♖g7 ♗xf5 26.♖xf7, etc.) 23.♗xf5 ♖xg5 24.♖xg5 h6 25.dxe7 ♖b8 [25...♖e8 26.♗xd7] 26.♖g3! ♗xf5 27.♖f3 winning a piece.”

20.♗xf5

Perhaps Black overlooked that the rook on g1 is defended.

1–0

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1963

Game 23

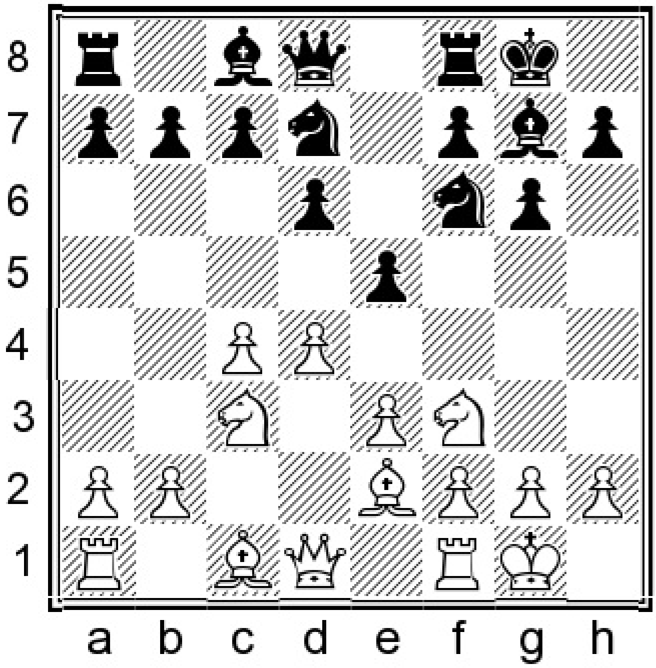
A very instructive "Indian" attack

It is to be expected that Fischer would bring new ideas to the lines he played, such as the Ruy Lopez, the Najdorf Variation of the Sicilian Defence, with both colours, etc.

Logically the King's Indian is another field where Fischer has left us model games; this is the first of several games where we shall see his ideal handling of King's Indian positions.

Arthur Bisguier
Robert Fischer
King's Indian Defence [E61]
Western Open, Bay City (6), 06.07.1963

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.♘f3 0-0 5.e3 d6 6.♗e2 ♘bd7 7.0-0 e5



Fischer also liked playing this position with colours reversed and an extra tempo, as we shall see.

8.b4

White starts an attacking race, on opposite wings. Other ideas include 8.♕c2, to continue with ♖d1, and White can also eliminate the tension by exchanging on e5, but of course this is less ambitious.

8...♖e8

Black’s typical procedure for launching his offensive on the kingside consists of first playing ...e4 and then supporting this advance adequately.

9.♗b2 e4 10.♘d2 ♘f8 11.♕c2

White could still change plan by playing 11.♕b3, with the idea of ♖ae1 and f3.

11...♗f5 12.d5

A double-edged move; it gains space, frees up the d4-square and opens the long diagonal, which at some point in the future might allow him to exchange the strong bishop on g7. On the other hand, it concedes the e5-square and rules out playing a timely ♘d5.

Exercise: How does the slow progress of Black’s offensive normally proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

12...h5

By using the h-pawn as a battering ram, to open lines on the kingside or else enable favourable piece exchanges.

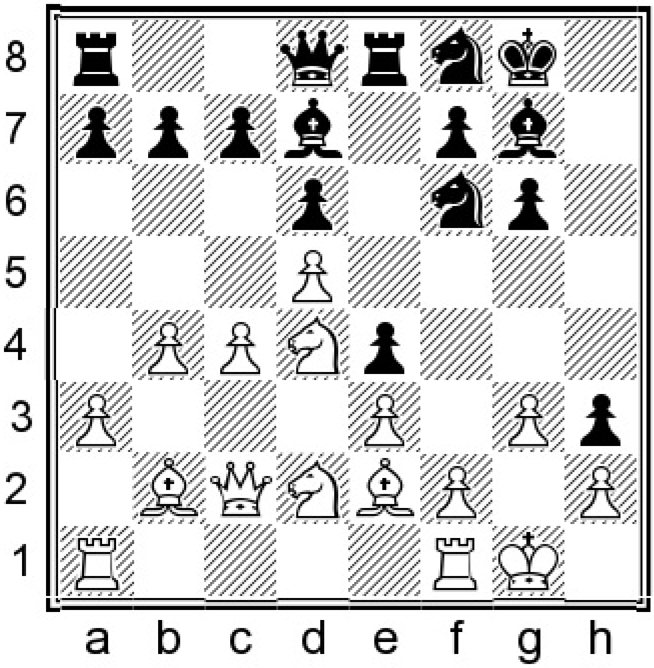
White has a free hand on the queenside, and the outcome of the struggle will depend on which side “gets there first,” implementing his own advance under good conditions.

13.♘b5 h4 14.♘d4 ♗d7 15.a3?!

A move which is difficult to understand; it’s of no help, either in defence or attack.

It seems better to play something like 15.h3 ♘8h7 16.♖fc1, intending to overprotect h3 with ♗f1 and later open lines with c5.

15...h3 16.g3



Exercise: There is more than one good move here. How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16...♕e7

Overprotecting the pawn on e4, with a specific idea in mind. The main alternative was to continue with the transfer of the knight to g5 by playing 16...♘8h7.

17.♖fc1

Exercise: How did Fischer's idea continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17...♗g4

This was the idea of 16...♕e7 – to be able to offer the exchange of bishops, while keeping the e4-pawn adequately defended.

17...♘8h7 was another standard move, but it would have been slightly more flexible to play this on the previous move.

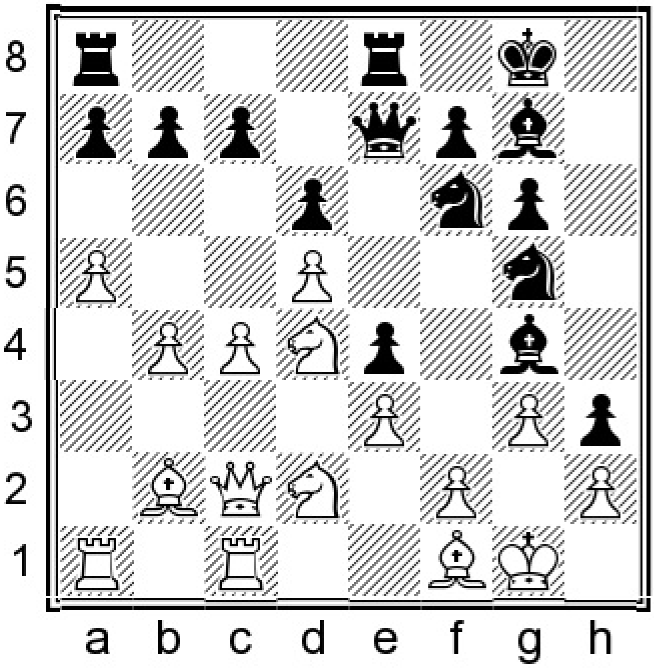
18.♗f1

Naturally White avoids the exchange of light-squared bishops, which would be unfavourable to him.

18...♘8h7

White has avoided the exchange of bishops but has left the one on g4 in a dominating position, ready to receive the collaboration of the knight from g5.

19.a4 ♘g5 20.a5



Exercise: How did Fischer continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20...a6!

This is a move which became standard; Fischer also used it in a similar position with colours reversed in Sousse 1967, as we shall see.

It's a move which stops 21.a6, combining attack with defence; the alternative was 20...♘d7, to which White might reply 21.a6 b6 22.♘c6.

It's worth noting that this line doesn't discourage the engines (in early 2021) from playing 20...♘d7, but over the board it would not be so attractive for Black to allow the white knight to embed itself on c6, after which White would continue to prepare the c5-break. In that case it isn't clear that the black attack will be the quicker of the two.

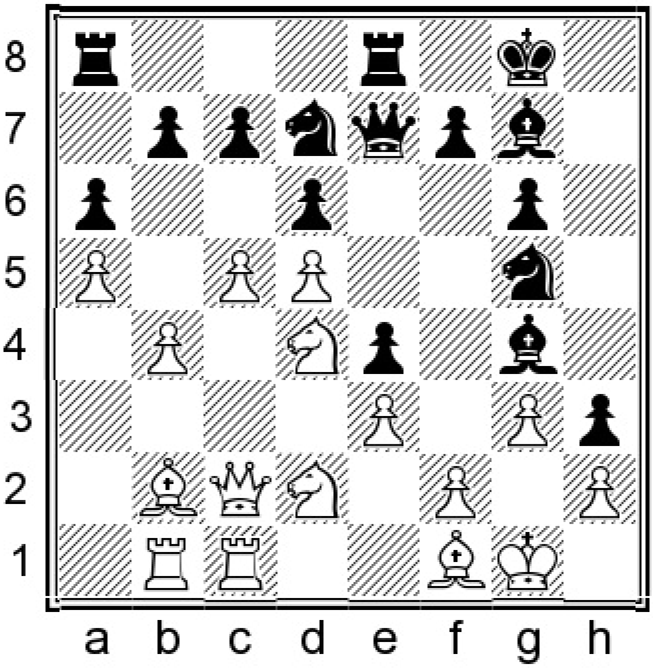
21.♖ab1

White seeks to take advantage of the new 'hook' on a6 by advancing with b5 at some moment.

21...♘d7!

A surprising manoeuvre; the knight retreats, and takes the pressure off d5, enabling White to play 22.c5. Initially this isn't the top option of the engines, but after a few minutes they consider it to be Black's best move.

22.c5



Exercise: What was Fischer's idea?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22...♗xd4!

Question: Now, that is a surprise! This isn't generally a good idea for Black in the King's Indian, is it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: You're right, it isn't usual for Black to exchange his dark-squared bishop in the King's Indian, because generally the kingside would be left very weak.

But that's not the case here. White is unable to exploit the absence of the fianchettoed bishop, and the knight on d4 was a strong piece, dominating many central squares and also collaborating in the defence of the kingside.

23.♗xd4 ♘e5 24.♗xe5

This exchange would soon have been necessary in any case. Black was planning to bring his queen to the kingside with ...♕d7-f5, when the power of the knight on e5 would increase.

Question: But this has resulted in the exchange of the dark-squared bishops and a pair of knights; what concretely has Black achieved with this simplification?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Well, the most important thing is perhaps that after exchanging two pieces there are now more lines available for attacking the weakened white king.

24...♕xe5 25.♘c4

It was suggested that White should open lines with 25.c6, although after 25...♕xd5 26.cxb7 ♕xb7 27.♕xc7 ♕d5 28.♘c4 (no 28.♕c2? ♕xd2) 28...♖ad8, Black's attack would still be on track.

25...♕e7

Fischer maintains the tension, without going in for complications, because he considers that his attack is more promising than White's.

The engines prefer the manoeuvre 25...♕xd5 26.cxd6 ♖ac8! and the position opens up on the queenside; this is illogical, because it is exactly what White wants, but for purely tactical reasons it favours Black here.

Let's look at a sample line: 27.dxc7 ♖xc7 28.♘b6 ♖xc2 29.♘xd5 and the exchange of queens brings no relief to the weak white king, but only because the black attack is surprisingly very strong;

the continuation might be 29...♖d2! 30.♘f6+ ♔f8 31.♘xg4 (White must defend h2 against 31...♘f3+ 32.♔h1 ♖xf2) 31...f5 32.♖d1 ♖xd1 33.♖xd1 ♘f3+ 34.♔h1 fxg4 and it is inevitable that the black rook will decisively invade the white camp, and the weakness of the white monarch is irreparable.

26.b5

White urgently needs to shift the focus of the struggle to the queenside, even sacrificing a pawn if necessary.

26...axb5

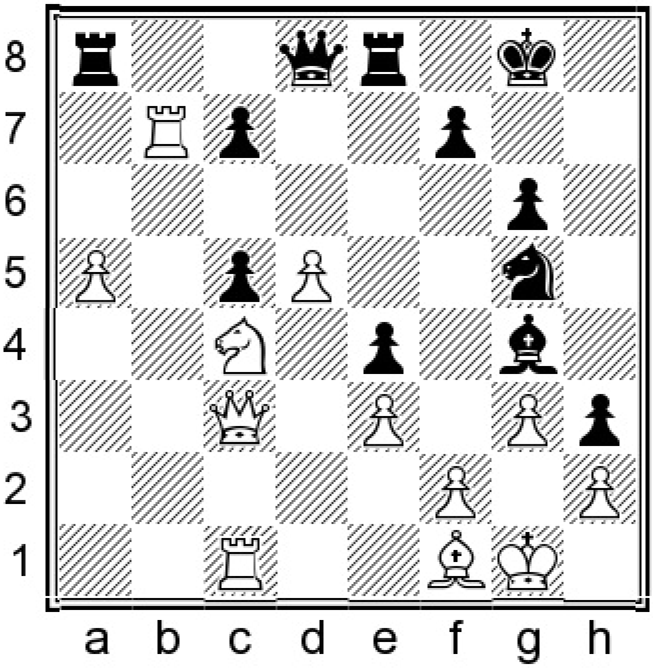
26...dxc5 27.b6 ♖ad8 28.bxc7 ♕xc7 was the alternative.

27.♖xb5 dxc5 28.♖xb7 ♕d8!

The queen evades the threat of 29.d6, while retaining the idea of joining in the attack from f6 at an opportune moment.

It is worth noting that Black is holding ...♘f3+ back, as there is no immediate benefit and it can't be prevented.

29.♕c3



Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29...♗c8!

Preparation for the capture of the pawn on d5, preserving the vital c7-pawn.

Question: But the bishop is abandoning its aggressive position; doesn't that weaken the attack?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Fischer once wrote: "Chess is a matter of delicate judgement, knowing when to punch and how to duck." It's more important here to retain the c7-pawn, and besides, the bishop's retreat isn't something irreversible – it can always move back. We should also note that the bishop now has a new square available on a6.

30.♖b5 ♕xd5 31.♕a3 ♕d8

The queen retreats before White captures on c5, in order to have more options; as well as f6 it has, in some lines, the d2-square as a possible invasion route.

There were alternatives, such as 31...♗a6, which was perhaps objectively better, but this is a decision requiring precise calculation. We have already seen that Fischer prefers to keep his options open, unless he sees a concrete reason for deciding where his pieces should go. Here, for instance the bishop might also go back to g4.

32.♕xc5

The alternative was 32.♖xc5, in which case it is likely that Fischer would have committed his bishop by playing 32...♗a6, and the white pieces are placed very awkwardly.

32...♘f3+

Black finally gives the check on f3 which has been latent for some time; in any case it was almost forced now, as the knight was attacked.

33.♔h1

Exercise: What did Fischer play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

33...♕f6!

Trying to exploit the weakness of the white monarch; Black plans to continue with 34.-- 34...♗a6 35.♖b4 ♘g5 36.♔g1 ♖ed8, with the idea of 37...♗xc4, followed by ...♖d2.

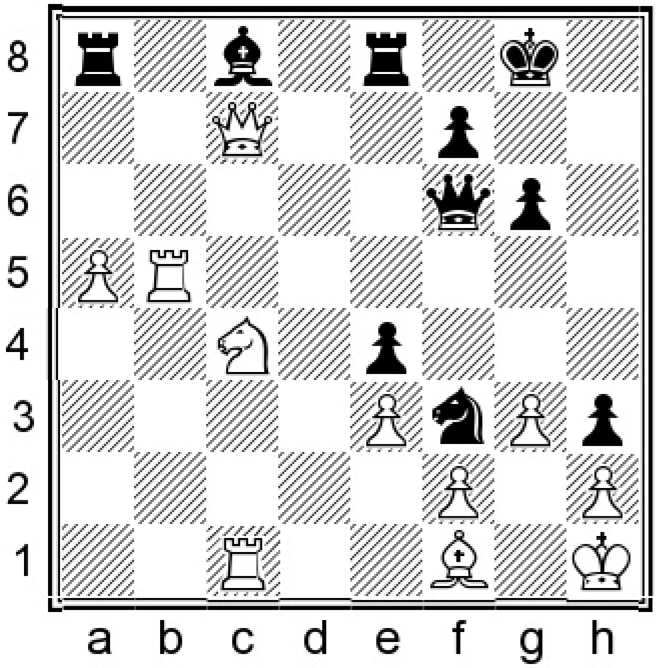
The alternative was the immediate 33...♗a6!, which once again leaves the white pieces awkwardly placed, since if 34.♖b2?! then 34...♕f6 comes with greater force; 34.♖b4 would be met with the same reply, when the engines see nothing better than offering the exchange with 34.♗xh3; then winning the exchange is playable for Black, but it seems more precise to play s 34...♔g7! first (with the idea of ...♖h8), with advantage to Black after 35.♗g4 ♗xb5 36.♕xb5 ♕f6.

Question: So 33...♗a6 was better?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes, it's possible that objectively 33...♗a6 was better, but over the board, in complex positions it's not always easy to know what to do for the best, and from the practical point of view Fischer's move was excellent.

34.♕xc7



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

34...♘xh2!

This was the idea, to further weaken the defences of the white king with this move, which had a crushing effect.

35.♔xh2?

Fischer's move wasn't objectively winning, but his opponent was unable to withstand the tension of the struggle and just collapsed. This is something that seems to happens often against the strongest players in history. I saw it before with Lasker and now I have it very much in mind having seen it repeatedly while writing a few months ago about Carlsen.

The only way to try to hold on was by exchanging queens with 35.♕f4!, but after 35...♕xf4 36.gxf4 ♘xf1 37.♖xf1 ♗a6 the white position looks about to crumble and especially with little time left it is logical that Bisguier thought it was bad, but what he played loses immediately.

In fact after 37...♗a6 White is worse but, despite appearances, it isn't easy to increase the advantage, e.g. 38.♖c5 ♖ac8 39.♖xc8 ♖xc8 40.♘d6 ♖c6 41.♖d1 ♗d3 42.♘b7, with the idea of 43.♔h2.

35...♕xf2+ 36.♔h1

Exercise (simple): Which move did White overlook?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

36...♗g4

0–1

Game 24

US Championship 1963

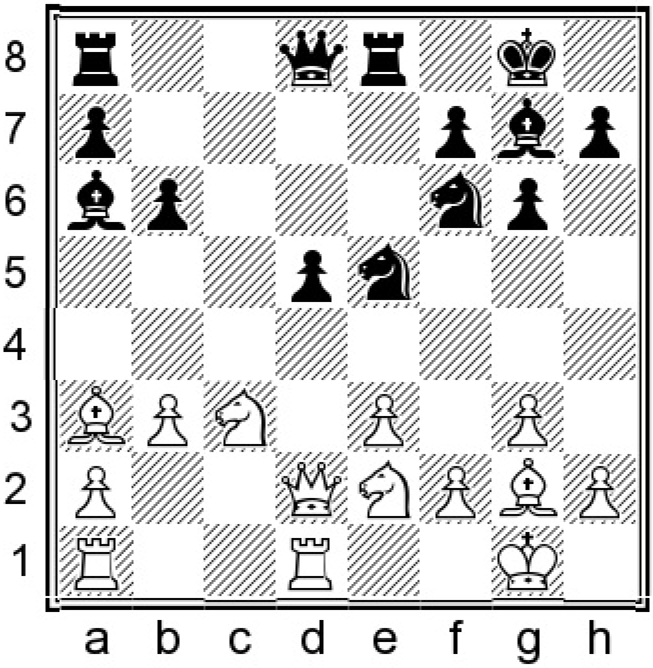
Fischer wins "the exhibition"

Fischer set a record in the 1963/64 US Championship, played in New York, by scoring 11 points out of 11, which caused Dr Hans Kmoch, as Fischer recounts, to congratulate Larry Evans, who was in second place, 3½ points behind, for "winning the tournament," and then he congratulated Fischer for having won the "exhibition."

Fischer began by defeating Edmar Mednis with Black, Lasker or Carlsen fashion, and wins in an ending that was forecast to be drawn, then he won against Evans with a King's Gambit, and in the third round he played a very well known game, for which he won the Brilliancy Prize. Let's look just at its ending.

Robert Byrne
Robert Fischer
Grünfeld Defence [D71]
US Championship, New York (3), 18.12.1963

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 c6 4.♗g2 d5 5.cxd5 cxd5 6.♘c3 ♗g7 7.e3 0-0 8.♘ge2 ♘c6 9.0-0 b6 10.b3 ♗a6 11.♗a3 ♖e8 12.♕d2 e5 13.dxe5 ♘xe5 14.♖fd1



Black to move

Black has achieved play very quickly at the cost of being left with an isolated pawn. It is true that in an endgame this would be a weakness but, as Tarrasch pointed out, "before the endgame the gods have placed the middlegame," and all Black's pieces are very active.

Exercise: How did Fischer take a great step forward?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

14...♘d3!

Such a knight is like a “rusty nail in your knee” (a comparison of unclear origin, but often ascribed to Bogoljubow).

Black threatens to follow up with ...♘e4, consolidating the position of his knight on d3.

15.♕c2?

White prevents the above-mentioned threat, and makes threat of his own (♖xd3), but he has overlooked a decisive continuation.

White has no completely satisfactory continuation. If 15.♘d4 then 15...♘e4 16.♘xe4 dxe4 17.♗b2 ♖c8, with unpleasant pressure; Hübner considered that this was the most tenacious defence, continuing with 18.a4, but of course Black stands better, after e.g. 18...h5.

15.♘f4 is not much better, e.g. 15...♘e4 16.♘xe4 dxe4 (not 16...♗xa1? 17.♘d6) 17.♖ab1 ♖c8 18.♘xd3 ♗c3! 19.♕e2 ♗xd3 20.♕g4 f5 21.♕h3 ♗xb1! 22.♖xd8 ♖exd8 23.♗f1 ♖d1 24.♔g2 ♗d3! 25.♗xd3 exd3, and wins. (Fischer).

Instead of 18.♘xd3 it was suggested that the most precise was 18.♗b4 ♘xf4 19.gxf4 ♕xd2; now 20.♗xd2 loses to 20...♗d3! 21.♖bc1 ♗c2 and 22...♗b2, and wins the exchange. Better, but still insufficient, is 20.♖xd2, after which there is a sequence which is full of threats: 20...♗d3 21.♖bd1 a5 22.♗d6 ♗c3, forcing 23.♖xd3 exd3 24.♖xd3, and now, among several moves which give Black a probably decisive advantage, the most precise seems to be 24...♗e1, with the idea of 25...♖c2, or 25...♖ed8.

Exercise: Why is Byrne’s move a mistake?

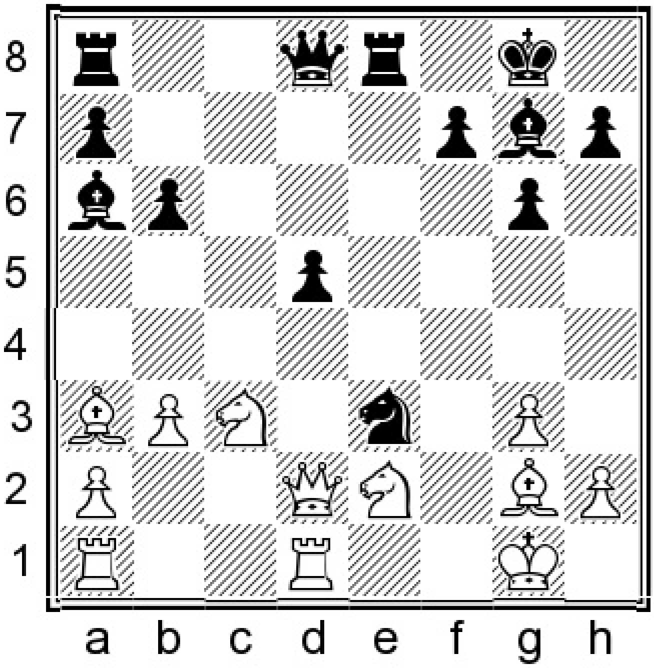
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

15...♘xf2!

This was a second threat; Byrne commented that he saw it, but considered it harmless, because he failed to see the real point of the sacrifice until very late.

16.♔xf2 ♘g4+ 17.♔g1 ♘xe3 18.♕d2



Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18...♘xg2!!

This is the defensive piece that should be eliminated; the white king will be subjected to a devastating attack.

Byrne was expecting 18...♘xd1? 19.♖xd1, when White would be fine.

19.♔xg2

Exercise: What was Fischer's idea?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

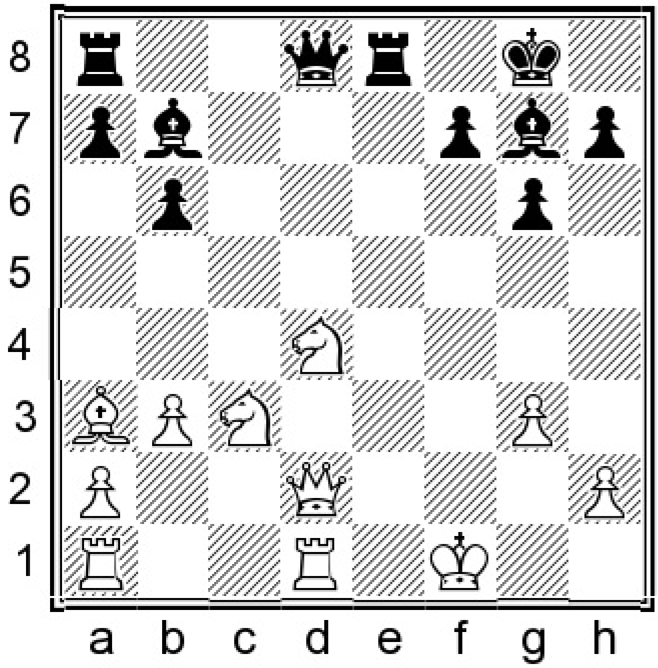
19...d4!

This is the final point of Fischer's piece sacrifice; his light-squared bishop joins in the attack.

20.♘xd4 ♗b7+ 21.♔f1

21.♔g1 ♗xd4+ 22.♕xd4 is no better, due to the deflection 22...♖e1+! 23.♔f2 ♕xd4+ 24.♖xd4 ♖xa1, with a winning position, e.g. 25.♖d7 ♖c8 26.♖xb7 (26.♗b2 ♖h1) 26...♖xc3 27.♖b8+ ♔g7 28.♗b2 ♖xa2.

If 21.♔f2 then 21...♕d7! 22.♖ac1 ♕h3 23.♘f3 ♗h6 24.♕d3 ♗e3+ 25.♕xe3 ♖xe3 26.♔xe3 ♖e8+ 27.♔f2 ♕f5!, and wins; these two sample lines were indicated by Fischer, and are endorsed by the engines half a century later.



Exercise: Fischer wrote that the full justification of the sacrifice wasn't evident until the moment when Byrne resigned. What was the move that prompted his resignation?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21...♕d7!

As in the previous line, now it's the queen's turn to infiltrate.

According to Evans, Byrne commented later: "The culminating combination is of such depth that even at the very moment at which I resigned, both grandmasters who were commenting on the play for the spectators in a separate room believed that I had a won game!".

Fischer was disappointed with Byrne's resignation; he was hoping for 22.♕f2 (less spectacular is 22.♘db5 ♕h3+ 23.♔g1 ♗h6) 22...♕h3+ 23.♔g1.

Exercise: Which move did Fischer have planned here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The beautiful 23...♖e1+!! 24.♖xe1 ♗xd4, with mate to follow.

0–1

“One of Fischer’s best games.” (Kasparov).

The wins continued: in the 4th round against Bisguier, and then after that Reshevsky, Steinmeyer, Addison, Weinstein and Donald Byrne all succumbed.

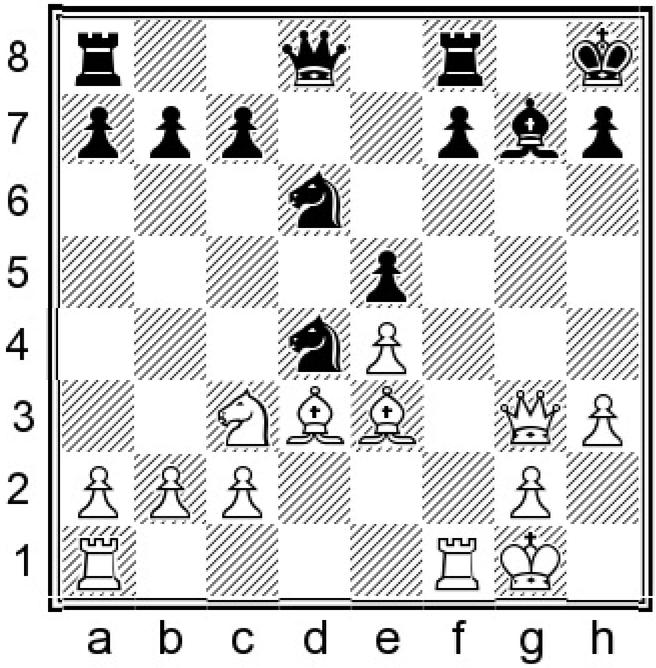
Game 25

En route for the record?

In the next to last game Fischer defeated Benko in another very well-known game, with another brilliant finish; we shall just look at how he finishes it off.

Robert Fischer
Pal Benko
Defence Pirc [B09]
US Championship. New York (10), 30.12.1963

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.f4 ♘f6 5.♘f3 0-0 6.♗d3 ♗g4 7.h3 ♗xf3 8.♕xf3 ♘c6 9.♗e3 e5 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.f5 gxf5 12.♕xf5 ♘d4 13.♕f2 ♘e8 14.0-0 ♘d6 15.♕g3 ♔h8



White to move

Black has a good knight on d4. but “one well-placed piece alone does not make up for the weaknesses in the position,” among which are the weaknesses of the black king and on the light squares.

White is better, although there are no serious threats from White as yet; Black is forced to play accurately.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16.♕g4

In principle to hinder 16...f5 and prevent Black from gaining more space and greater mobility.

16...c6

Black decides to prevent ♘d5; Fischer considered this too passive, and it is, but on the more active move 16...c5 White could play 17.b3 and Black remains with problems; possibly he should enter complications with e.g. 17...c4 18.bxc4 ♘xc4 19.♗xc4 ♕c8, but after 20.♘d5 ♕xc4 21.♗g5 White is still better.

Exercise: How to continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17.♕h5

The attack is taking shape; now there is a threat of 18.♗xd4 exd4 19.e5.

17...♕e8?

This defence has a tactical drawback; Fischer indicated that was essential to try 17...♘e6, (which would be answered with the obvious 18.♖ad1) or 17...c5 (answered with 18.b3, with ♘d5 to follow at some point), although White’s advantage would be beyond doubt.

Exercise: Fischer now found a forced win – how does it begin?

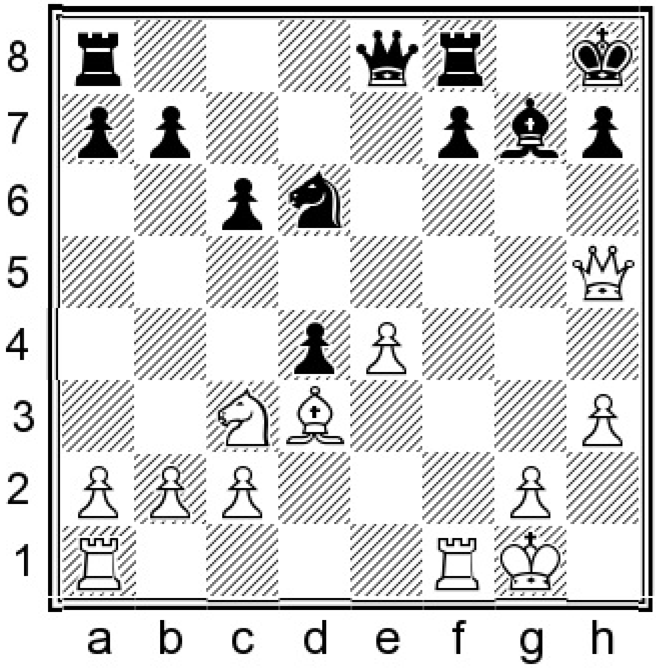
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18.♗xd4

The first step, although Benko wasn’t afraid of this.

18...exd4



Exercise: How did Fischer destroy Black’s defence?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19.♖f6!!

This beautiful intermediate move (to which Fischer awards just one exclamation mark, while Kasparov gives it two) was not foreseen by Benko, who was expecting 19.e5, to which he had prepared the defence 19...f5!.

19...♔g8

There is no good defence against the threat of 20.e5.

20.e5 h6

Exercise: Fischer forced resignation with his next move; what was it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21.♘e2!

Better than 21.♖xd6?! ♕xe5!, which, although it should also lose after 22.♕xe5 ♗xe5 23.♘e4, allows Black to continue the struggle.

There is no defence against the threat of 22.♖xd6; if 21...♘b5 then 22.♕f5 wins, while if 21...♗xf6 then 22.♕xh6, with mate to follow.

1–0

This spectacular win brought Fischer to 10 points out of 10!

Amid great expectation, the final round was reached and only one question now hung over the tournament, which had already been won by Fischer: would he achieve the perfect score?

Game 26

“THE AMAZING VICTORY STREAK OF BOBBY FISCHER”

This is how Anthony Saidy commented on what happened in the final round, in Karsten Müller’s book *Bobby Fischer - The Career and Complete Games of the American World Champion*:

“For everyone else, the final round of the tournament may have been about Fischer’s historic chance of making a perfect score, but not in my mind – where it was about – me!

And why not? Was I not a 26-year-old amateur making my best-ever tournament showing? (...) And my 6½-3½ score then was nothing to sneeze at, ahead of Benko, the Byrne brothers, Reshevsky, Bisguier et al. I had exceeded all predictions, and who knew what my limit would be in chess, self-schooled amateur or not? Fans of ‘alternative history’ novels will understand.

Going into the final game. I certainly did not expect to upset Fischer: I hardly knew the opening but played simply, and he went along with the scenario, opting for a N-v.-B endgame with a minimal edge. In the corridor, Evans said to me, ‘Good. Show him we’re not all children.’ At adjournment I had to seal a move.

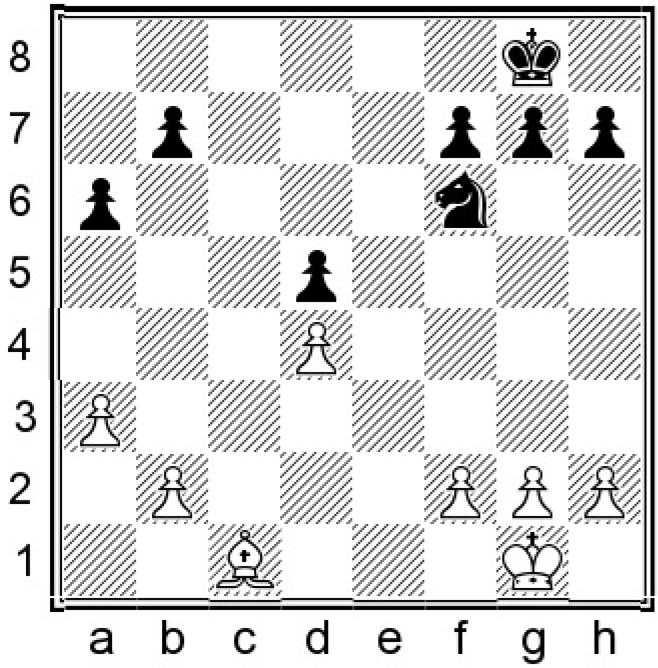
I pondered for a full 45 minutes. I saw a clear way to a draw, re-examined it, then analysed it once more – a forced line of ten moves or so. But I did not trust my own analysis! Or rather I put my general positional knowledge ahead of my concrete analysis. I sealed a different, wrong move. Looking over the position that evening, I realised my folly.

Next day, when the envelope was opened and my move revealed, a smile flickered over Bobby's face. The rest is history."

Let's look at the final part.

Anthony Saidy
Robert Fischer
English Opening [A32]
US Championship, New York (11), 02.01.1964

1.c4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e6 6.♘db5 ♗b4 7.a3 ♗xc3+ 8.♘xc3 d5 9.e3 0-0 10.cxd5 exd5 11.♗e2 ♗f5 12.♘b5 ♕b6 13.0-0 a6 14.♘d4 ♘xd4 15.♕xd4 ♕xd4 16.exd4 ♖ac8 17.♗d1 ♗c2 18.♗e3 ♗xd1 19.♖fxd1 ♖c2 20.♖d2 ♖fc8 21.♖xc2 ♖xc2 22.♖c1 ♖xc1+ 23.♗xc1



Black to play

At a quick glance, but also objectively, Black's winning chances are almost nil. White has only one easily defensible weakness on d4 and the bishop has mobility.

Nevertheless, from the practical point of view the situation is different; Fischer's task is to create difficulties, however slight, for his opponent, and to just keep the game going.

Exercise: What plan did Fischer start with?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

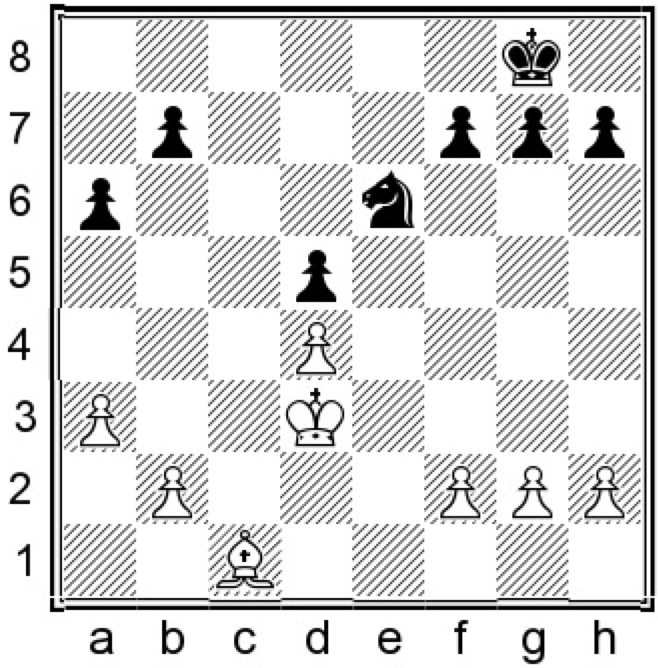
23...♘d7!

First of all the knight heads for e6, to put pressure on the d4-pawn and thus restrict the mobility of the white pieces.

24.♔f1

Having seen the course of the game, it is easy to agree with the suggestion 24.g4 ♘f8 25.♔g2 ♘e6 26.♗e3, which was perhaps objectively better, but it isn't easy to change the pawn structure without a concrete reason, and this still wouldn't have prevented Fischer from unbalancing the game.

24...♘f8 25.♔e2 ♘e6 26.♔d3



Exercise: Now Black needs to choose the best place for the king. What do you think Fischer played here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

26...h5!

Preparing to advance the king by way of h7 and g6 and also gaining space on the kingside.

27.♗e3 ♔h7 28.f3 ♔g6 29.a4

Saidy puts his faith in the solidity of his position and continues to wait, a decision which objectively does not deserve criticism.

Once again it was very difficult to play a move such as 29.g4, which according to complicated analysis made in 2004 was thought sufficient to draw, but which in 2021 is now considered insufficient.

29...♔f5 30.♔e2

Exercise: How can Black continue to make progress?

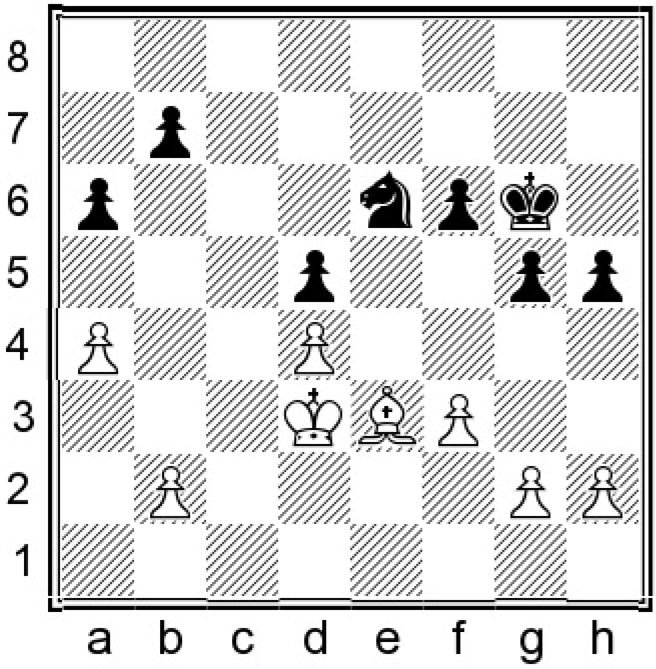
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

30...g5!

Of course, there is no other way. Black needs a pawn break in order, in the medium or long term, to be able to infiltrate with the knight and/or the king.

31.♔f2 ♘d8 32.♗d2 ♔g6 33.♔e3 ♘e6 34.♔d3 ♔f5 35.♗e3 f6 36.♔e2 ♔g6 37.♔d3



Exercise: After the previous manoeuvring phase, the time has now come to take another positive step; what do you think Fischer played here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

37...f5!

The pressure on d4 is not enough; there is no way in, so Fischer looks for another method of making progress, although objectively the position remains equal.

38.♔e2 f4 39.♗f2 ♘g7

There is nothing immediate; the knight goes to f5, from where it puts pressure on d4 and forces White to keep in mind the possible threat of ...♘h4.

40.h3 ♘f5 41.♔d3 g4!

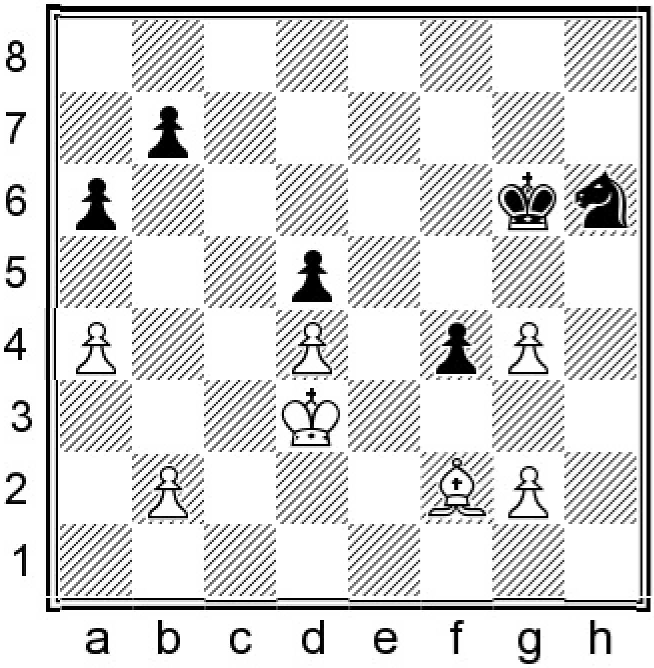
No further progress is possible through manoeuvring, so Fischer implements the only available pawn-break.

Question: But as this involves pawn exchanges, doesn't it bring the draw closer?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes, indeed. Black has no advantage, but it forces White to take decisions which require accurate calculation, and it isn't easy to withstand Fischer's constant pressure.

42.hxg4 hxg4 43.fxg4 ♘h6



44.♗e1?

This is Saidy’s only clear mistake. The only way to draw now was with 44.♔e2! ♘xg4 45.♗g1! (not 45.♔f3? ♘xf2! 46.♔xf2 ♔f5 47.♔f3 a5 48.b3 b6 since White is now in zugzwang and must allow ...♔e4) 45...♔f5 46.♔f3 ♘f6! (preventing further simplification with 47.g3) 47.♗h2 ♘h5 48.a5! (not 48.b3? a5 49.♗g1 ♘g7 50.♗f2 ♘e6 51.♗g1 ♘g5+, and once again the black king enters via e4) 48...♔g5 49.g4 fxg3 50.♗xg3, as indicated by Timman, among others; the bishop is liberated and can defend d4 actively, while White can defend his queenside with his king. Kasparov delved deeper into this line and confirmed this evaluation.

44...♘xg4

“Now it is hard for White to defend his weak pawns, and it would appear that he already has a lost position.” (Kasparov).

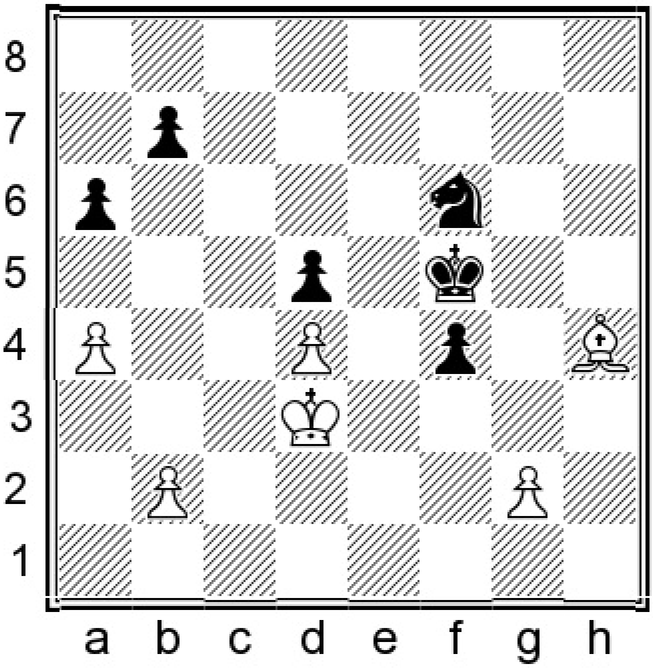
45.♗d2

Instead 45.a5 ♔f5 46.b3 fails to 46...♘e3! 47.g3 ♘g2 48.♗f2 ♔g4! 49.gxf4 ♔f3 50.♗g1 ♘xf4+ 51.♔d2 ♔e4 52.b4 ♘e6 53.♔c3 ♘c7, followed by ...♘b5, and wins; unlike the position arising after 44.♔e2!, here the black king is very active, while White’s bishop is passive and out of play on g1.

45...♔f5 46.♗e1

46.a5 loses to 46...♘f2+! 47.♔e2 ♘e4 48.♗e1 ♔g4 49.♔d3 (49.b3 ♘g3+) 49...♘d6! 50.♔e2 (50.b3 ♘f5!) 50...♘c4! 51.b3 ♘e3 52.♔f2 ♘f5 53.♗c3 ♘d6 54.♔e2 ♘b5 55.♗b2 ♔g3 56.♔f1 f3 (Kasparov).

46...♘f6 47.♗h4



47...♘e4!

Various sources wrongly indicate that the move played was 47...♘h5? and continue with 48.♗e1?, transposing to the game, but in instead, with 48.a5 ♔g4 49.♗f2 ♘g3 50.b3!, taking the c4-square away from the knight, 50...♘f5 51.♔e2! White draws, e.g. 51...♘h4 52.♗xh4 ♔xh4 53.♔f3 ♔g5 54.g3 fxg3 55.♔xg3.

48.♗e1

Now after 48.a5 ♔g4 49.♗e1 ♘g3 50.♗f2 ♘f5 51.♔e2 ♘d6!, forcing White to use up his reserve tempi with the b-pawn, e.g. 52.b3 ♘e4 53.b4 ♘xf2 54.♔xf2, and now Black wins by triangulating with 54...♔g5! 55.♔e2 (of course if 55.♔f3 then 55...♔f5 wins now) 55...♔f6 56.♔f2 ♔g6 57.♔e2 ♔g5, and the black king infiltrates, e.g. after 58.♔f2 Black can play 58...♔g4 59.♔g1 ♔g3 60.♔f1 f3, and wins.

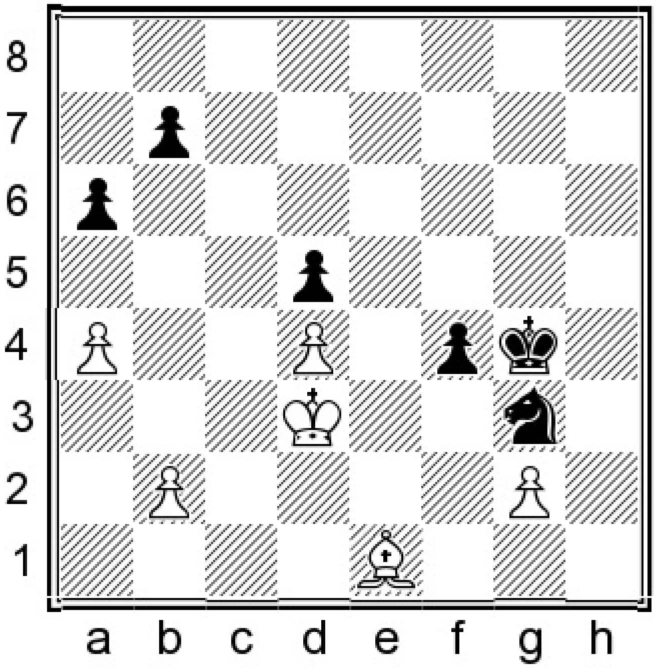
If White does not allow the exchange and instead of 53.b4 plays 53.♗e1 then Black infiltrates by means of 53...♘g3+ 54.♔f2 ♘f5 55.♗c3 ♘d6 56.♗b4 ♘e4+ 57.♔f1 f3, and the black king enters with 58...♔f4 and wins.

48...♔g4 49.♔e2

If 49.b3 then e.g. 49...♘g3 50.♗f2 b6 51.b4 b5 52.axb5 axb5 53.♗e1 ♘f5, and White cannot defend d4 while also preventing infiltration at e3, g3 or h4.

49...♘g3+ 50.♔d3

If 50.♔f2 then 50...♘f5 51.♗c3 ♘e3!, e.g. 52.a5 ♘d1+ 53.♔e2 ♘xc3+ 54.bxc3 ♔g3 55.♔f1 f3! wins (Kasparov).



Exercise (simple): How did Fischer conclude the game?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

50...♘f5!

Heading for h4, eliminating all resistance.

51.♗f2 ♘h4 52.a5

Or 52.♗xh4 ♔xh4 53.♔e2 ♔g3 54.♔f1 f3.

52...♘xg2 53.♔c3 ♔f3 54.♗g1 ♔e2 55.♗h2 f3 56.♗g3 ♘e3

“Another example of irresistible Fischer pressure!”. (Kasparov).

0–1

The spectacular result attracted widespread attention; the front page of *Sports Illustrated* was headlined, as we have seen, “THE AMAZING VICTORY STREAK OF BOBBY FISCHER.”

Frank Brady wrote: “Chess publications around the world wrote of the unparalleled achievement.

Only Bent Larsen, always a Fischer detractor, was unimpressed: ‘Fischer was playing against children,’ he said.

Reshevsky a child? Robert Byrne? Larry Evans? Pal Benko?”.

A leap in time

Twenty years after this game, the first world title match between Anatoly Karpov and Garry Kasparov took place.

Fischer held the outrageous conviction that all the games between “the Russians” were fixed. He was talking about all, or almost all, but this does not stand up to the slightest analysis.

How should one react to that? You could try to refute it, since that doesn’t seem very difficult, but... would you really jeopardise a chance to converse with Caruso, Beethoven, Cervantes, etc., just for the sake of proving that you’re right?

After concluding his 1992 match with Spassky, Fischer went to Hungary. Lajos Portisch relates in *My Secrets in the Ruy Lopez* that he had the opportunity to talk to him in Budapest; they had always got on well, ever since their first encounter in Bled in 1961. They spoke mostly about chess, until Fischer said to him something which he repeated a number of times, “You know that all games of the Russians are pre-arranged!” He was annoyed when Portisch did not agree with his opinion.

Portisch took the most positive attitude. “Although I knew that he was talking rubbish, I had to admit that any attempt to dissuade him from his strong false beliefs would be futile.” Portisch stopped trying and concentrated on what united them.

As is well known, Fischer spent his final years in Iceland, where he had little contact with people. One of the few was Helgi Olafsson, who in 2012 wrote a magnificent book, *Bobby Fischer comes home: The Final Years in Iceland, a Saga of Friendship and Lost Illusions*.

The “fixed” games were an inevitable part of Fischer’s conversation, in which he reiterated his conviction that the ninth game of the 1984-85 match was based on his game against Saidy in the 1963-64 US Championship.

Olafsson gave no credence to this theory either and said to him, “I think it’s a coincidence. That pawn formation must surely have occurred many times.”

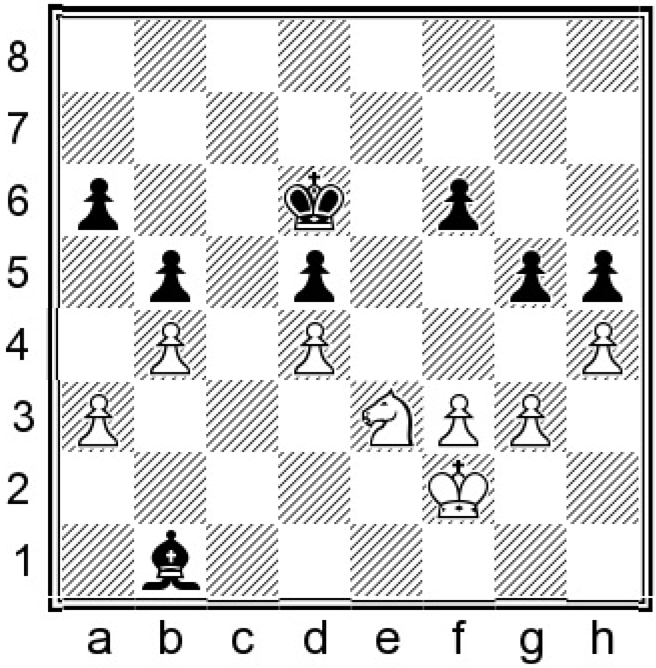
Fischer looked at him in astonishment and said: “No way. I am absolutely sure you could not find a single example of such a position, at least not before my game with Saidy.”

Olafsson was determined to prove that he was right, and got in touch with a chess-playing IT expert. He asked him to find similar positions from before the game against Saidy. They used a database of 3,000,000 games; after an intense search and just when they were beginning to think that Fischer was right, the search threw up a game Levenfish - Kotov, played in Leningrad in 1939, where the winning method was similar to the one used by Fischer. There was also a similarity to Fairhurst - Keres, Hastings 1954.

They took the print-out, hundreds of pages long, to Fischer. Fischer was impressed by their research, and although he would not admit it, it showed that Olafsson was right.

Let’s now look at the ending of the game in question, which is very well known and can be seen in many books, including those by Karpov and Kasparov.

Anatoly Karpov
Garry Kasparov
World Championship, Moscow, (9), 05.10.1984



Black to play

46...gxh4?

“The exchange of pawns (had it occurred!) would have made it easier to achieve a draw. Indeed, the g3-g4 breakthrough would be neutralised, and there would only remain the f4-point for White to penetrate into the enemy position. But both of his pieces, king and knight, would be unable to invade through there simultaneously. However, White finds a study-like possibility.” (Karpov).

47.♘g2!!

“Psychologically this move was hard for Black to anticipate; after all, in his analysis after the exchange on h4 the white h-pawn would have remained on the board, and both g-pawns would have been removed. This unexpected knight manoeuvre involves a pawn sacrifice, but material equality is soon restored, and the two white pieces penetrate together into the opponent’s position.” (Karpov).

Here is the rest of the game without comment.

47...hxg3+ 48.♔xg3 ♔e6 49.♘f4+ ♔f5 50.♘xh5 ♔e6 51.♘f4+ ♔d6 52.♔g4 ♗c2 53.♔h5 ♗d1 54.♔g6 ♔e7 55.♘xd5+ ♔e6 56.♘c7+ ♔d7 57.♘xa6 ♗xf3 58.♔xf6 ♔d6 59.♔f5 ♔d5 60.♔f4 ♗h1 61.♔e3 ♔c4 62.♘c5 ♗c6 63.♘d3 ♗g2 64.♘e5+ ♔c3 65.♘g6 ♔c4 66.♘e7 ♗b7 67.♘f5 ♗g2

68.♘d6+ ♔b3 69.♘xb5 ♔a4 70.♘d6

1–0

Show in Text Mode

1965

Game 27

Reappearance in the 1965 Capablanca Memorial

Fischer had the right to play in the 1964 Amsterdam Interzonal Tournament, but he did not take part, in spite of FIDE having changed the system for finding the challenger for the World Champion, which would now be decided through matches. Neither did he take part in the 1964 Tel Aviv Olympiad, and it was only in 1965 that he showed any interest in playing again. He was ready to play in the Capablanca Memorial in Havana, but the US State Department did not allow it. However, the year before grandmaster Larry Evans had already circumvented the ruling by travelling as a journalist, and then playing in the tournament, since there were no restrictions for journalists and businessmen. Fischer tried to go as a correspondent for *Chess Life* magazine, but he was not permitted to do so.

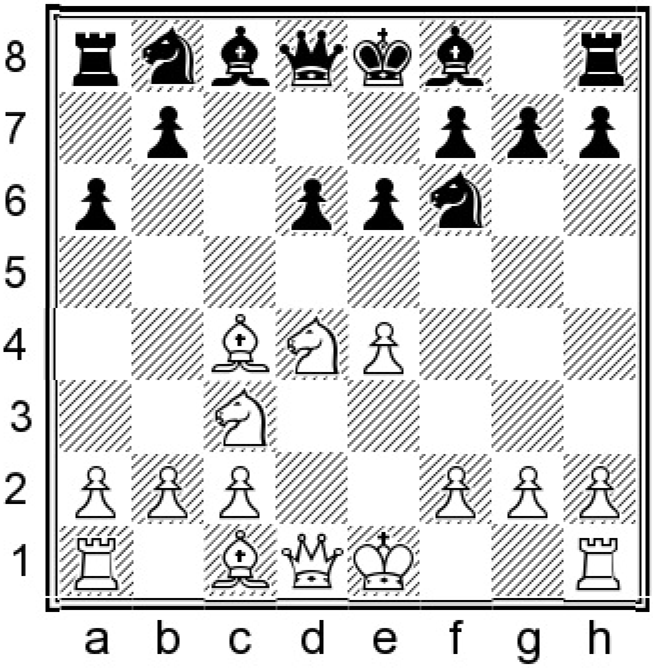
Nonetheless, Fischer found a way to compete, and that was to play by telex, from the Marshall Chess Club in New York. Fischer would write down his move and hand it to an arbiter, who in turn would give it to a messenger. He would then transmit it, together with the amount of time used, from the next room where the telex machine was situated, to Havana. Then the procedure was repeated in reverse.

It was a gruelling method for both players, who sometimes had to be at the board for twelve hours, (and even then, games might be adjourned). The difference for the other competitors was that they only had to do this once in the tournament, while Fischer had to do so every round, so that the advantage he conceded was considerable.

Fischer blamed not being able play directly over the board for his performance; he was not far behind the leader Smyslov, whom he beat in the second round, but then he had three losses, and his final “sprint” with three wins was not enough for him to catch up with Smyslov, although it was good enough for a share of second place with Geller and Ivkov, with 15 points out of 21, half a point behind the overall winner.

Karl Robatsch
Robert Fischer
Sicilian Defence [B86]
Capablanca Memorial, Havana (11), 09.09.1965

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗c4 e6



7.a3

As we know, 6.♗c4 was also the Fischer’s favourite line against “his” Najdorf variation, although he preferred to omit 7.a3, considering that this idea, which he attributed to Bronstein, was “too slow.”

Question: What’s the point of this move, which seems unnecessary?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: It has its virtues, such as allowing the c4-bishop to retreat to a2, instead of to b3, where it is exposed to attacks with ...♘c6-a5 or ...♘bd7-c5; it also anticipates a possible ...b5-b4 by Black, expelling the ♘c3; the snags are mainly the tempo loss and the fact that it more or less rules out the possibility of queenside castling.

7...♗e7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♗a2 b5 10.f4 ♗b7 11.f5

This is one of the main ideas of the line popularised Fischer in the 1960s and ‘70s; White forces the weakening of the d5-square, and increases the scope of his favourite bishop, the light-squared one.

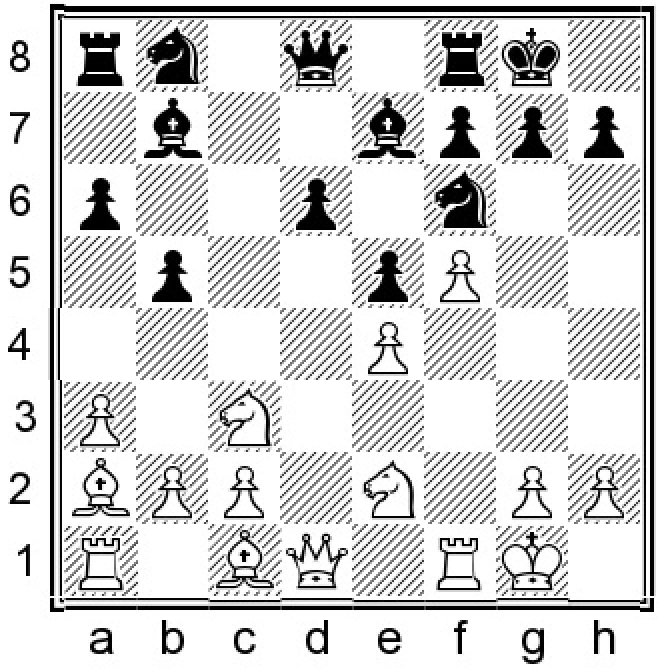
11...e5

“Black is healthy as long as White can’t exploit his hole on d5.” (Fischer).

12.♘de2

This knight plans to go to g3 and h5, collaborating in the elimination of the defenders of the d5-

square.



12...♘bd7

A “normal” developing move.

Exercise: Fischer rejected the capture of the centre pawn with 12...♘xe4?; why?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Because White obtains an very dangerous attack after 13.♘xe4 ♗xe4 14.♘g3 ♗b7 and now it is possible to sacrifice a second pawn: 15.f6! ♗xf6 16.♘h5 (threatening 17.♖xf6 gxf6 18.♕g4+, followed by mate) 16...♗e7 (or 16...♘d7? 17.♕g4 g6 18.♕xd7!, and wins) 17.♕g4 g6 18.♗h6.

It’s also interesting to refrain from sacrificing the pawn with 15.f6 and instead to play 15.♘h5, threatening 16.f6, e.g. 15...♗f6 16.♕g4 (threatening 17.♘xg7) 16...♔h8 17.♘xf6 gxf6 18.♕h5 ♖g8 19.♖f2 ♕b6 20.♔f1, followed by ♗xf7.

13.♘g3

Exercise: How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13...♖c8

The most logical move, occupying the half-open file and creating the latent possibility of the exchange sacrifice on c3.

The engines like 13...a5, but Fischer's choice is more "human," bringing a piece into play on its "compulsory" square.

14.♗e3

As mentioned earlier, White's idea is to exploit the weakness of d5; 14.♗e3 plans to eliminate the future ♘b6, while 14.♗g5 envisages to remove the ♘f6; which bishop move is better? It is difficult to say.

Exercise: Instead of these moves 14.♘h5 is inadvisable – why?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Because of the thematic exchange sacrifice; after 14...♘xh5 15.♕xh5 Black plays 15...♖xc3! 16.bxc3 ♘f6, followed by 17...♘xe4, with great play.

In Olafsson - Fischer, Bled 1959, 14.♗g5 was played and after 14...♘b6 15.♘h5. Fischer then carried out the thematic sacrifice 15...♖xc3, but in this position it isn't best and after 16.bxc3 ♘xh5 17.♗xe7 ♕xe7 18.♕xh5 ♗xe4 White could have played 19.f6! gxf6 20.♕h4, with advantage; he chose 19.♕g4 instead, but ended up winning nonetheless.

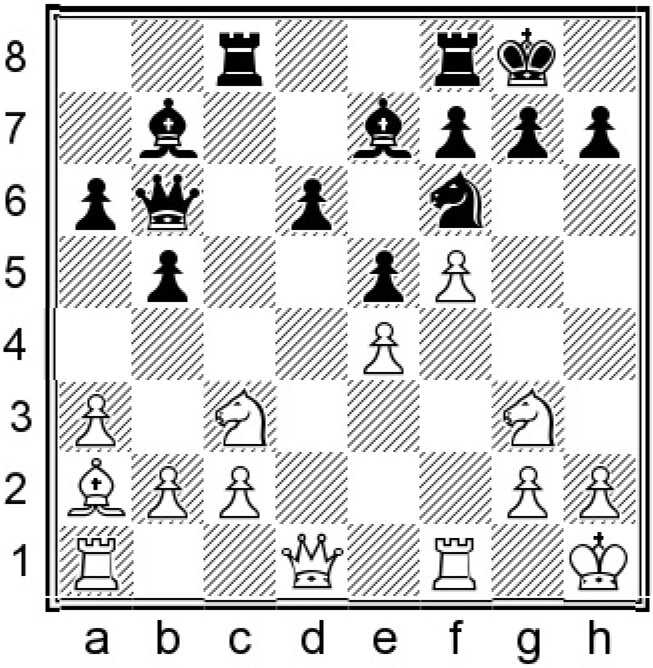
Instead of sacrificing the exchange it was better to play 15...♘c4!.

However, the immediate 14...♖xc3! was also appropriate and after 15.bxc3 ♘xe4 (15...♗xe4 is also acceptable) 16.♘xe4 ♗xe4 17.♗xe7 ♕xe7 18.♗d5 ♘f6 19.♗xe4 ♘xe4 20.♔h1 ♕h4 21.♕f3 d5, Black had more than enough compensation for the exchange in Cirić - Gligorić, Novi Sad 1965.

14...♘b6 15.♗xb6

This was White's idea, as we mentioned. If White spares the life of the knight Black would play 15...♘c4 and after 16.♗xc4 ♖xc4, he could follow up with ...♕a8, ...♖fc8, etc., with the better position.

15...♕xb6+ 16.♔h1



Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16...♕e3!

“To prevent ♘h5, with the better game for Black.” (Fischer).

With this incursion the queen neutralises White’s attacking plans. If it is attacked with 17.♖f3, it retreats to g5 (17...♕g5), planning 18...♘g4 or 18...♘h5, with the further possibility of playing 18...♕h4, combined with ...♘g4.

The “Sicilian” exchange sacrifice was also playable: 16...♖xc3 17.bxc3 ♗xe4 18.♘xe4 ♘xe4 and here White has many options, such as returning the exchange with 19.c4, but after 19...♘f2+ 20.♖xf2 ♕xf2, e.g. 21.cxb5 axb5 22.♕d3, although Black stands better it isn’t easy break White’s domination of the light squares.

Fischer, as in other phases of this game, prefers to keep the tension, seeking more.

17.♘d5

Played after thinking for 45 minutes.

Exercise (simple): White’s task is already not a question of how to preserve the advantage, but how to keep the balance. Trying to proceed with his initial idea of 17.♘h5 would be mistaken -

why?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Because Black could, without any risk, capture the centre pawn with 17...♘xe4!, e.g. 18.♘d5 ♗xd5 19.♗xd5, and now not 19...♘f2+?? 20.♖xf2 ♕xf2 21.♕g4, and wins, but 19...♗g5!, renewing the threat of 20...♘f2+, followed by 20...♘f6, or 18.♕g4 ♕g5, retaining the extra pawn.

17...♗xd5

Question: Why exchange this bishop rather than the knight?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Because after the alternative 17...♘xd5 18.exd5 there would be a risk that the b7-bishop might become an inactive piece, and also because the knight is a good defender of the castled position.

18.♗xd5 ♗d8!

A strong move from the practical point of view, activating the passive bishop.

The alternative was the also attractive line 18...♘xd5 19.exd5 ♗h4!, which might lead to a promising ending after 20.♖f3 ♕d4 (20...♕h6? 21.♘e4 is horrible) 21.c3 ♕xd1 22.♖xd1 ♗xg3 23.♖xg3 f6.

Fischer prefers to keep the position more complicated.

It is worth noting that at first the current engines (mid-2020) prefer 18...♘xd5, but after a while they come round to preferring Fischer's move.

19.a4

Opening the a-file offers White nothing special here.

19.♗b7 achieves nothing, since after e.g. 19...♖b8 20.♗xa6? Is impossible due to 20...♕b6.

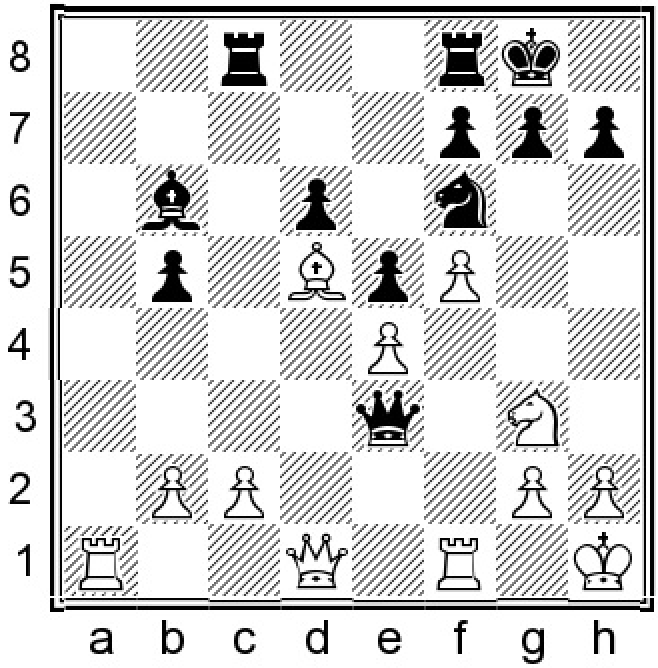
White's best course is first to consolidate his position, by relieving the pressure on the c-file with 19.c3!.

19...♗b6 20.axb5

Now 20.♗b7 would be answered with 20...♖c4, when 21.♗xa6 ♖xa4 22.♗xb5? would fail to 22...♖xa1 23.♕xa1 ♘g4!.

There would be no advantage in interpolating 21.a5 ♗a7, since 22.♗xa6? would be bad due to 22...♖b8!, e.g. 23.♕xd6 ♘g4!, threatening 24...♕g1+! and ...♘f2++, as well as the simple 24...♘f2+.

20...axb5



21.♖a6

Exercise: This was the idea, but Fischer will show that it is an inaccuracy – how?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21...b4!

Question: Why is this advance good?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Because it creates more pressure on the c2-pawn and increases Black’s control of the squares c5 and d4, now that White can no longer influence these squares with c3 and b4.

Now 22.♖f3 is ineffective, since Black can simply reply with 22...♕d4, not fearing 23.♖d3? due to 23...♘g4!; Black could even play the immediate 22...♘g4! With the idea of 23.♖xe3 ♘f2+.

This all indicates that it was preferable to play 21.c3!.

22.♘h5

White continues to seek the initiative; on the less aggressive 22.♗b3 Black could play 22...♗c5, and if 23.♕f3 then 23...♕g5, as before, when the idea of ...♕h4 followed by ...♘g4 is unpleasant for White.

Exercise: What to play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22...♘xd5

The only promising move; 22...♘xh5?! 23.♕xh5 leaves a powerful bishop on d5 putting strong pressure on f7 and compensating for Black's pressure along the c-file; then 23...♖xc2?? would lose to 24.♕xf7+! and mate in four moves.

After 22...♘xe4? the black position is untenable; White plays 23.♗xe4 ♕xe4 24.♖xb6 ♖xc2 25.♖g1, defending solidly, and with numerous threats of his own; then if 25...♖xb2? White has 26.♕c1!, and wins.

23.♕g4?

Question: How can this be bad? It activates the queen with a gain of time and it seems the most consistent with White's previous play, wouldn't you say?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Robatsch continues to play in "do or die" style, and yes, it's consistent with his earlier play, but it will fail.

It turns out that this is White's only clear mistake. It's a matter of calculation; White's initiative white isn't sufficient.

Instead, 23.♕xd5? ♖xc2 would be bad for White, but after 23.exd5 ♖c4!, preventing ♕g4 by White, "all three results," as they say, would still be possible.

23...g6 24.exd5

Exercise: What is the punishment for White's erroneous attack?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24...♖xc2

It is true that all the white pieces are active, but Black has sufficient defence. The capture on c2 has the virtue of allowing the f-rook to be neutralised with a timely ...♖f2.

25.fxg6

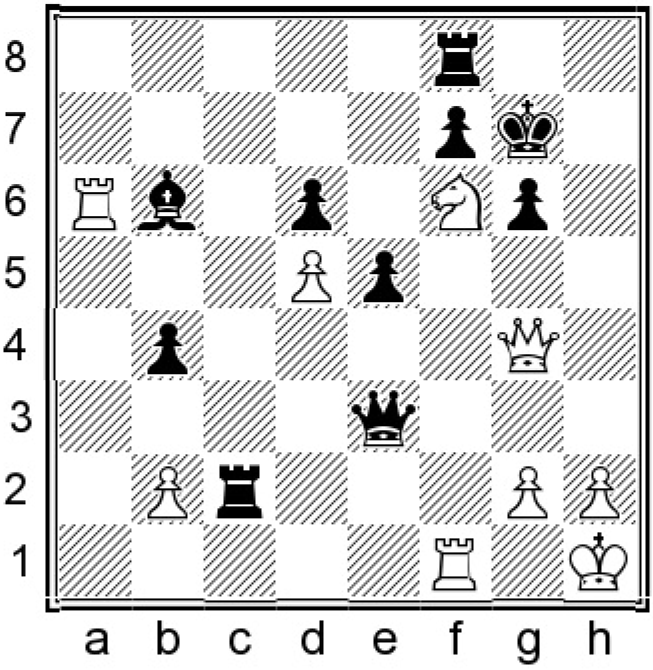
Exercise: In the event of 25.♘f6+ ♔g7 26.♖xb6, what would you have played?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Accepting the sacrifice with 26...♕xb6 leads to a draw with 27.fxg6 hxg6 28.♘h5+ ♔g8 29.♘f6+, but there is more than one refutation; the strongest is 26...♖c1!, and wins after 27.♘h5+ ♔h8 28.♘g3 ♖xf1+ and ...♕xb6.

25.♘f6+ ♔g7 26.♘e4 is also inadequate; White has no serious threats and there are several strong replies, among which there is the crushing 26...♕d3! 27.♖aa1 ♖c4!, e.g. 28.f6+ ♔h8 29.♖ae1 ♗e3.

25...hxg6 26.♘f6+ ♔g7



27.♘h5+

Exercise: There was also the possibility of 27.♕h4, threatening mate; how would you respond in that case?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The strongest reply is 27...♖f2!, taking away the knight's support; after the forced simplification 28.♕xf2 ♕xf2 29.♖xf2 ♗xf2 30.♖xd6, Black can attack the b-pawn, for example with 30...♗d4, intending to bring the rook into play with ...♖c8 or ...♖a8; then after 31.b3, among other things, the immediate 31...e4! 32.♘xe4 ♖e8 is strong.

Exercise: Instead of 27...♖f2!, 27...♖h8? would be careless – why?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: White has perpetual check in several ways, e.g. with the elegant 28.♕xh8+ ♔xh8 29.♖a8+ ♔g7 30.♖g8+ ♔h6 31.♖h8+, and if 31...♔g5?? 32.h4++, so the king must go back to g7.

There is also a draw with 28.♘e8+.

For a long time it was thought that 28.♘h5+! also led to a draw, but the strongest current engines show that in fact White wins; the main line runs 28...♖xh5 (or 28...♔h6 29.♘g3+, followed by ♕f6+) 29.♕f6+ ♔h7 (29...♔h6 30.♖a8) 30.♕xf7+ ♔h6 31.♕f8+ ♔g5 32.♕f6+ ♔h6 33.♖a8! ♖c7 34.♖h8+ ♖h7 35.♖xh7+ ♔xh7 36.♕f7+ ♔h6 37.♕f8+ ♔g5 38.♕f6+ ♔h6 39.h4!, when Black must give up his rook to prevent mate and will soon also lose the pawn on d6.

27...♔h6!

"The king is a strong piece," not just in the endgame, but sometimes (rarely) in the middlegame, as in this case, where Fischer has a specific idea.

The difference with 27...♔h8 will be seen later.

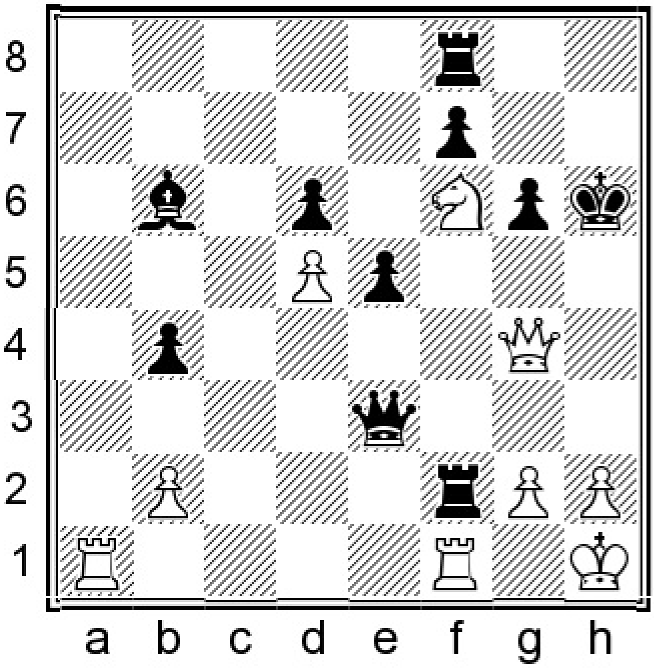
28.♘f6

If 28.♖xb6, with the idea of 28...♕xb6? 29.♕h4!, and wins, Black has the decisive intermediate move 28...♖c1!.

28...♖f2

We're already familiar with this defensive idea, which undermines the f6-knight and parries the main threat, which was 29.♕h4+ and ♕h7++.

29.♖aa1



Exercise: How did now Black defend now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29...♖a8!

With an effective and elegant counterattack, which brings into play the only inactive black piece. Now White will experience some back-rank problems. This move was only made possible by 27...♔h6!; in contrast, with the king on h8, the capture ♖xa8 would be with check.

Fischer played the most active move, also pre-empting an eventual fork with ♘d7.

Exercise: The move played is better than preventing the fork with the more passive 29...♗d4; can you find a concrete variation to support this?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: White has 30.♕h4+ ♔g7 31.♘h5+ gxh5 32.♖xf2 ♕xf2 33.♕g5+ and perpetual check.

30.♕xb4

White rushes to regain the pawn. Instead, 30.♖ad1 was more tenacious, although there is no doubting Black's advantage; here's a sample line: 30...♔g7 31.♘h5+ ♔f8 32.♘f6 ♗d4, and now on 33.♕h4 Black has the elegant 33...♖xf1+ 34.♖xf1 ♕f4!.

30...♔g7

Black must not lower his guard; 30...♖xf6? would lose the game, due to 31.♕h4+.

31.♕xd6

Now there is no defence. After 31.♘g4 there are several continuations winning, such as 31...♕f4!, when the ending should be winning for Black, in view of his better structure and the strength of his bishop.

31...♕e2! 32.♘e8+ ♖xe8 33.♖fe1 ♕g4

0–1

Game 28

The demand for a longer national championship

Fischer played in eight US Championships, and won all those he took part in.

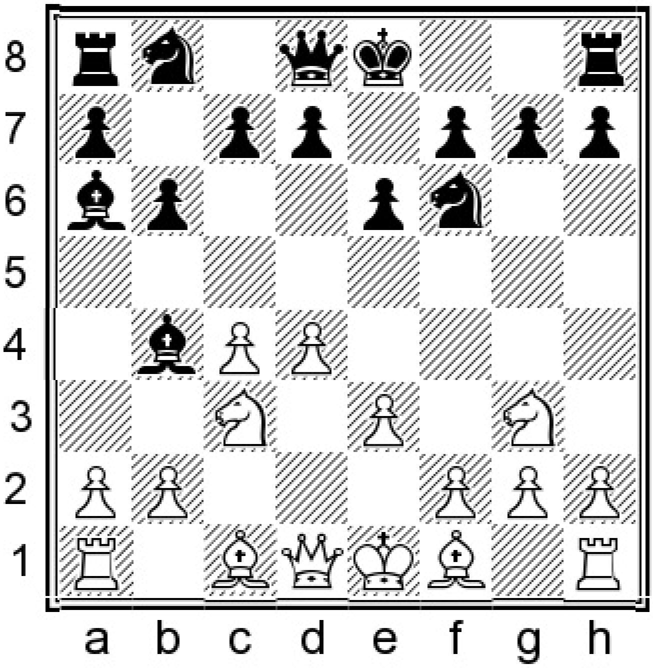
In the penultimate US Championship in which he competed, 1965/66, he started with 6½ out of 7, and was very close to his record of the previous year.

We shall look at his seventh-round win, after which Fischer seemed to be on the way to a comfortable tournament victory, but then two defeats in rounds 8 and 9 put that triumph in doubt.

That gave Fischer another two reasons to demand a much longer tournament, where truly "the best player will win," rather than a tournament with just 10 or 12 competitors.

Anthony Saidy
Robert Fischer
Nimzo-Indian Defence [E45]
US Championship, New York, (7), 12.1965

1.c4 ♘f6 2.♘c3 e6 3.d4 ♗b4 4.e3 b6 5.♘ge2 ♗a6 6.♘g3



6...♗xc3+!

"A principled decision in the spirit of Nimzowitsch," wrote Kasparov, in regard to this doubling of White's pawns.

Inflicting doubled pawns on the opponent was something that generally appealed to Fischer, but in this case it is basically to prevent White from advancing with e4; at the moment, he can't play 6...d5?? due to 7.♕a4+.

The exclamation mark was awarded by Fischer himself, who wrote that 6...0-0 is inferior due to 7.e4, based on 7...♘c6 8.♗d3 d5 (8...♘xd4? loses to 9.♕a4) 9.cxd5 ♗xd3 10.♕xd3 exd5 11.e5 ♘e4 12.a3!, with a clear advantage to White, as in Portisch - Spassky, Moscow 1967.

He added that White also maintains the initiative after 7...c5 8.d5 d6 9.♗e2 exd5 10.exd5 ♗xc3+ 11.bxc3 ♘bd7 12.0-0 ♖e8 13.♕a4, etc., Portisch - Reshevsky, Santa Monica 1966.

Subsequently further games were played with this line, but the evaluation has remained unchanged.

7.bxc3 d5 8.♕f3

Fischer considered that this whole idea was dubious.

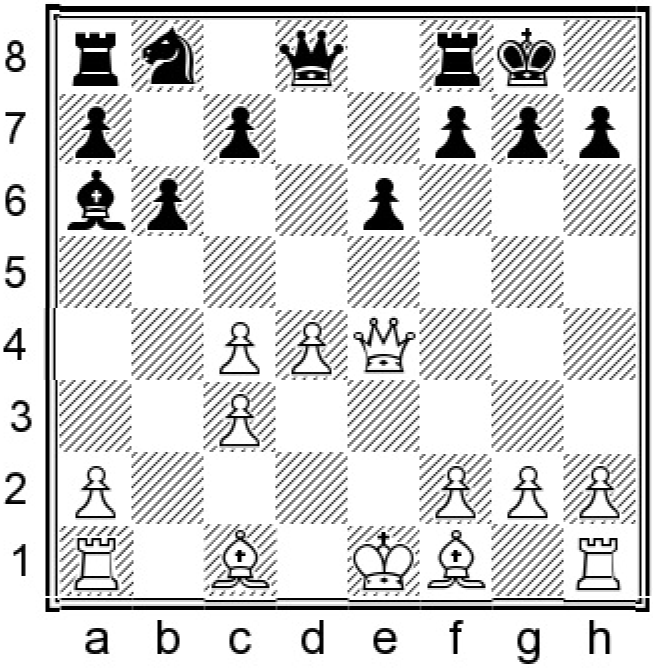
In the Siegen Olympiad of 1970 Portisch posed greater problems for Fischer with 8.♗a3 and instead of taking on c4 with the bishop, leading to a slightly better endgame for White, Fischer opted for the riskier 8...dxc4, which he had recommended in his book *My 60 Memorable Games*, but after 9.e4 (instead of the line 9.♕f3 ♕d5 given by Fischer) White obtained good compensation for the pawn and Fischer experienced problems.

8...0-0 9.e4

Here the right move is 9.cxd5, as indicated by Fischer.

9...dxc4?!

A few months later, in Portisch - Fischer, Santa Monica 1966, Fischer played the stronger 9...dxe4! and play continued 10.♘xe4 ♘xe4 11.♕xe4.



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Not with the “obvious” move 11...♘d7, which White was expecting, with the continuation 12.♗d3 ♘f6 13.♕h4, but with 11...♕d7!, offering to exchange the white queen for both black rooks and preparing ...♘c6-a5.

There followed 12.♗a3?!, which is inaccurate, because the gain of time is an illusion; on a3 the bishop remains exposed to a future ...♕a4, and after 12...♖e8 13.♗d3 f5 White should have played 14.♕e2 (or even 14.♕f3), but then 14...♘c6 or 14...♕a4 would be promising for Black.

Instead Portisch played the natural but bad 14.♕xa8?; in this case the two rooks are inferior to the queen, which is unusual, but here “the more numerous white army is unable to achieve coordination!,” (Kasparov) and play continued 14...♘c6 15.♕xe8+ ♕xe8 16.0-0 ♘a5 17.♖ae1 ♗xc4 and Fischer gained a great victory, 0-1 in 35 moves.

“It is staggering to what extent Fischer surpassed one of the world’s leading grandmasters in depth of evaluation of a non-standard position,” wrote Kasparov.

10.♗g5! h6 11.♗d2?

After this passive retreat everything is once again fine for Black.

11.h4!, with the threat of 12.e5, would have created more problems; after 11...♗b7 12.♗xc4 White regains his pawn with a good centre, although it would be more advantageous to enter an endgame with 12.♗xf6 ♕xf6 (of course Black must exchange queens in order not to lose to an attack) 13.♕xf6 gxf6 14.♗xc4, with advantage to White, thanks to his better structure.

Fischer mentioned Spassky's idea of 12.♘h5; after 12...hxg5 13.hxg5...

Exercise: Can you show that the idea is attractive but unsound?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Not with 13...♘xe4?, due to 14.♘f6+!! ♘xf6 15.♕h3, and White mates.

The right move is 13...♘h7! when 14.♘f6+ gxf6 15.♕h5 is refuted with 15...♗xe4, while after 15.♖xh7 fxg5 16.♕h5 ♕f6 White's attack comes to a halt, leaving Black with an extra piece.

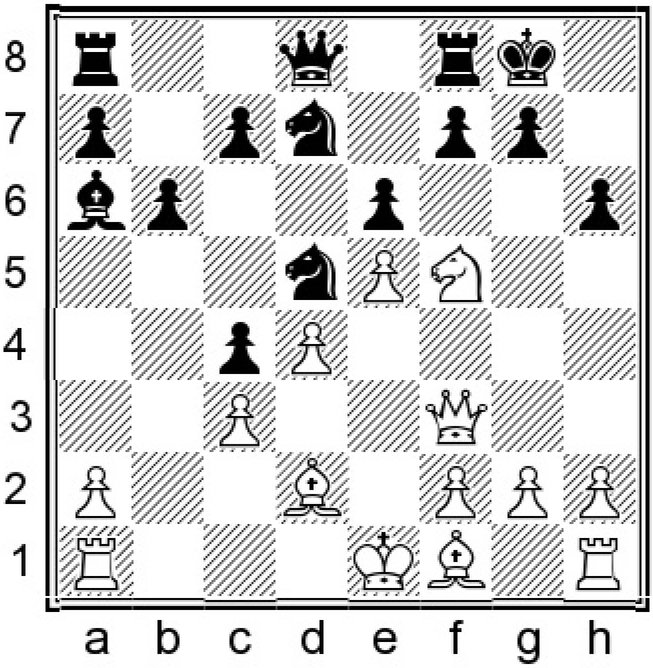
11...♘bd7

Now it will be harder for White to find active chances and Black continues his development.

12.e5?

White is relying on a tactical idea, which won't work. It was better to play 12.♗e2, when Black would have good play after 12...c5, but the struggle would have hardly begun.

12...♘d5 13.♘f5?!



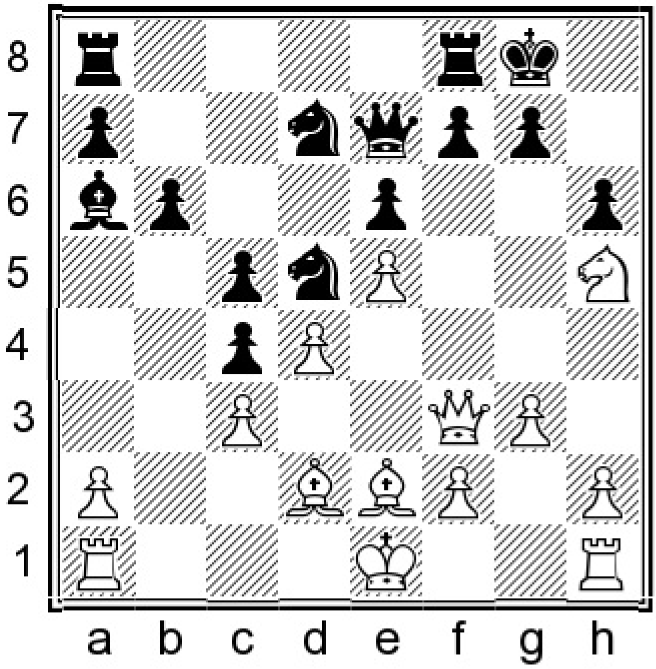
This optimistic leap is the reason for his previous move, which conceded the magnificent d5-square to the knight.

13.♘h5 wasn’t dangerous either; White is poorly developed, which means it is difficult to achieve anything positive by attacking; Black might respond with 13...♕h4, stopping 14.♕g3 and 14.♕g4, while if 14.g3 then 14...♕e7 (not fearing 15.♕g4?! due to 15...f5!).

After 14.♗e2 there are several attractive moves, such as 14...c5 or 14...f5.

It’s curious that the engines are attracted to the apparently unnecessary 14...♖fe8, the reason being that they want to make room for the monarch.

After 14...c5 15.g3 Black should play 15...♕h3, and after 16.♗f1 ♕f5 the ending is slightly favourable to Black. But what if Black wants more than this? Let’s see what happens after 14...c5 15.g3 if Black plays 15...♕e7 instead.



Exercise: What can White play here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: White can force a draw by sacrificing two pieces with 16.♘xg7! ♔xg7 17.♗xh6+ ♔xh6 18.♕h5+ ♔g7 19.♕g4+ and it's perpetual check, precisely because the king doesn't have f8 available as an escape square.

13...exf5

Fischer chooses the simplest move which gives him the advantage, without dwelling on more complicated alternatives. This is something we have seen him do on other occasions.

In this case it's possible that 13...f6! was even stronger; opening up the game generally favours the side with better development and White's direct threats are inadequate in this case.

It's not clear that White has anything better than 14.♕e4, to which Back can reply 14...♕e8, preventing 15.♘xh6+ since Black has g6 under control, while after 14.♘xh6+ gxh6 15.♗xh6 Black has a clear advantage after 15...♕e7.

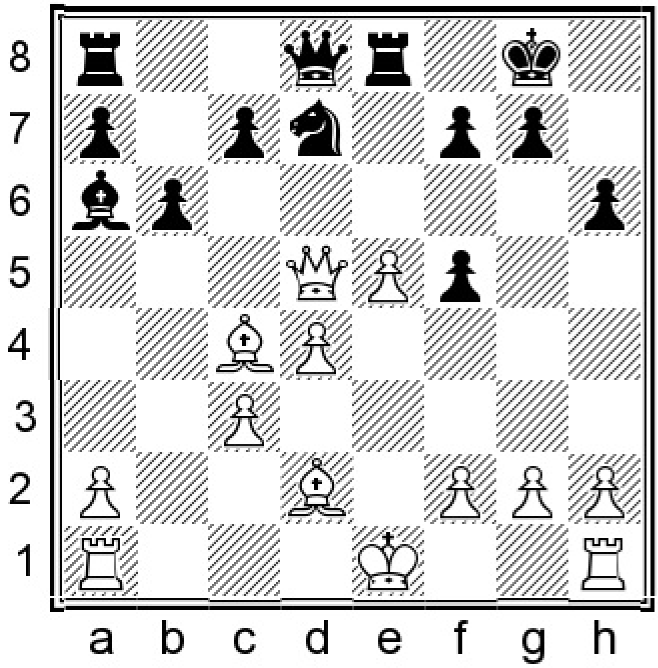
14.♕xd5 ♖e8

The alternative was 14...♕e7, intending ...♖ad8 followed by ...f6, and preventing 15.♗xc4? due to 15...c6! 16.♕xc6 ♖ac8.

15.♗xc4?!

Instead, 15.♗e2?! would have allowed 15...♘xe5! 16.♕xd8 ♘d3+. It was necessary to lose another tempo with 15.♗e3.

The move played is tempting, since it regains the pawn and it brings kingside castling nearer, but it fails.



Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

15...♘xe5!

With a crushing exchange sacrifice.

16.♕xd8

Of course 16.dxe5?! ♕xd5 17.♗xd5 ♖xe5+ is worse.

16...♘xc4+ 17.♕xe8+ ♖xe8+ 18.♔d1

Exercise (simple): After the previous forced sequence, how should Black continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18...♘xd2

Of course, by simplifying and enabling the entry of the black rook; it also leaves the white forces uncoordinated and furthermore it even leads to the capture of a second pawn. What more can you ask?

19.♔xd2 ♖e2+ 20.♔c1 ♖xf2

For the exchange Black already has two pawns, and there are more to come. And with the white rooks both passive, Black's advantage is decisive.

21.g3

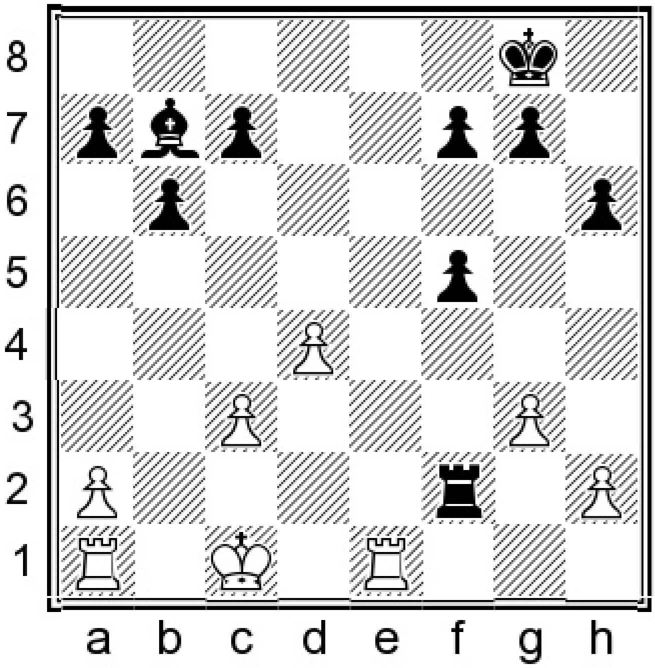
If 21.♖g1 then among other options Black has 21...♗d3, preventing ♖b1-b2 and intending to play 22...♗e4.

21...♗b7

Heading for e4 with gain of time.

22.♖e1

22.♖d1 ♖xh2 23.d5 ♖h3 is equally futile; more pawns are falling and White can do nothing with only one of his rooks active.



Exercise (simple): What do you think Black played here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22...♗e4

Nullifying any counterplay along the e-file. It was also possible to capture on h2, but this is simpler; the possibility of a check on c2 adds to White's difficulties.

23.♖e3

White is unable to activate his a1-rook in time; a 23.a4 can be answered simply with 23...♖xh2 24.a5 ♖c2+ 25.♔d1 ♖xc3.

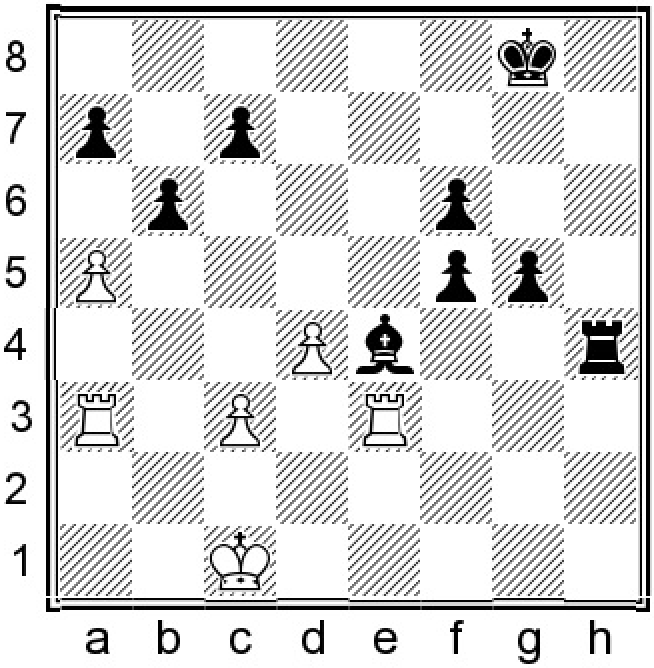
23...♖xh2 24.a4 h5

The position is so winning that Fischer doesn't even bother to restrain White's activity with 24...a5 and instead he mobilises his kingside pawn majority.

25.♖a3

If 25.a5 then Black could play 25...b5.

25...g5 26.♖b3 f6 27.a5 h4 28.gxh4 ♖xh4 29.♖a3



After needing to waste several tempi, White hurries to activate a rook, but it's already too late.

Exercise: There are several moves to win here. What plan did Fischer begin?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29...♖h7!

The rook retreats, for both defensive (c7) and aggressive purposes.

30.axb6 axb6 31.♖a7

Exercise: What was the above-mentioned aggressive purpose?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

31...♖e7

Overprotecting the bishop and thus enabling the advance of the kingside pawn-mass, which is now unstoppable.

32.d5 ♔f7 33.♔d2 f4 34.♖e1 f5 35.c4 g4 36.♖b7 g3 37.d6 cxd6 38.♖xb6 f3

0–1

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1966

Game 29

Recovery in one of the strongest tournaments of the time

From January 1964 until mid-July 1966 Fischer played only 33 official games, including the 1965 Capablanca Memorial and the 1965 US Championship, as we have seen.

In July and August 1966 he took part in one of the strongest tournaments of the decade, the 2nd Piatigorsky Cup, in Santa Monica, USA. Present were World Champion Tigran Petrosian, Boris Spassky, who had challenged Petrosian only months earlier, Bent Larsen, considered to be the best player in the West, together with Fischer, and other top-class players.

Fischer paid a high price for being out of training; in the first cycle he suffered three defeats and at the end of that cycle he was in next-to-last place, on 3½ points out of 9, while the leaders Spassky and Larsen had 6 points.

In *New in Chess* magazine, Jan Timman relates that on the occasion of Fischer's death a construction worker called Jim Morrison sent him a curious message via the Internet. He told him that when the Santa Monica tournament was taking place, very early one morning while he was working in the Hotel Miramar, Fischer and his friend Lombardy were out walking. He was able to hear an excited Fischer telling his friend in a very loud voice, believing he was talking in private: "I'm going to crush Najdorf, and Larsen! Petrosian doesn't have a chance. Just wait until I get to play Spassky!".

This conversation, which shows Fischer's fierce competitive spirit, so impressed that workman that forty years later he still remembered it almost word for word.

In fact everything changed in the second cycle. Fischer scored six wins, and even though Spassky ran away with first prize all on his own, with his admirable come-back Fischer moved up from second-to-last to overall second.

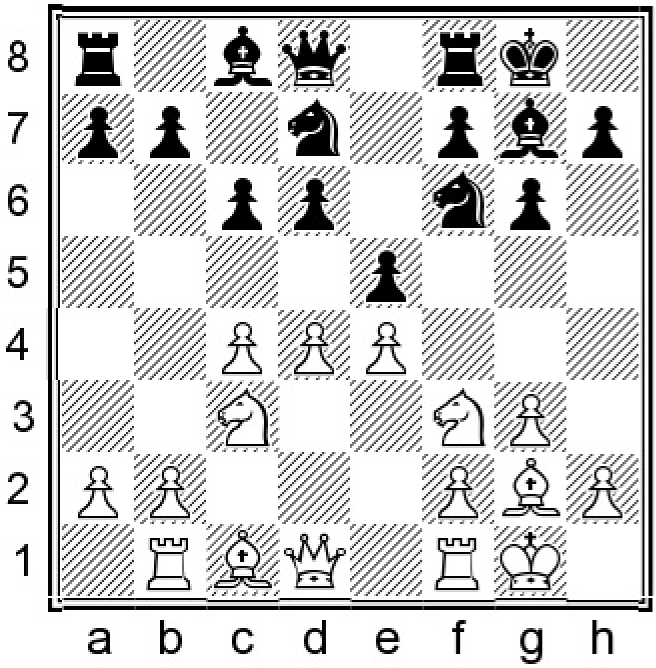
That was the last time that Fischer did not come first in a tournament.

Let's look at one of his wins from the final rounds:

Jan Hein Donner
Robert Fischer
King's Indian Defence [E68]
2nd Piatigorsky Cup, Santa Monica (13) 07.08.1966

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.g3 ♗g7 4.♗g2 0-0 5.♘c3 d6 6.♘f3 ♘bd7 7.0-0 e5 8.e4 c6 9.♖b1

A deviation from the main move, 9.h3, which controls g4, ready for playing ♗e3.



This move is an idea which Portisch had employed against Najdorf in the first round del tournament, and which Donner also played against Najdorf in the third round.

Question: This move really doesn't seem anything special – what's the point of it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Of course, 9.♖b1 isn't the sort of move you play hoping for a quick victory, but it's an attempt to create a position which is more favourable than in the main lines.

Among other things, it's designed to neutralise the queen sallies 9...♕b6 and 9...♕a5, which can be answered with 10.b4, as indicated by Portisch.

In Portisch - Najdorf the game continued 9...♖e8 10.h3 a5 11.♖e1 and here Najdorf couldn't find any further useful waiting moves and he played 11...exd4, but after 12.♘xd4 ♘c5 White revealed one of the keys to his idea: the queen's bishop doesn't want to go to e3 but a more active square and he played 13.♗f4!, preventing the typical regrouping ...♘fd7, with advantage to White.

Exercise: Naturally this idea would have come as no surprise to Fischer. How did he respond?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

9...a6!

This elegant move, which also looks equally unassuming, is aimed at preventing b4.

The idea became popular many years later, in a similar position of the same line, planning the sequence ...exd4, ...c5, ...♘e5 and finally ...b5.

10.b4?

It’s odd that Donner should once again play this advance, which is very committing and which gave him no advantage against Najdorf. Admittedly this is one of the ideas behind 9.♖b1, but Black has taken measures to make it ineffective.

It’s possible that Donner wasn’t concerned about finding improvement at some point and was happy to reach an equal position, but Fischer significantly improved Black’s play.

10.h3 ♖e8 11.b4 would transpose to Donner - Najdorf from the third round. Black stood very well after 11...b5 12.cxb5 axb5 13.♗e3 ♗b7 14.♖e1 exd4 15.♘xd4 ♘e5.

Subsequently, against Petrosian, in round 15, instead of 11.b4 Donner preferred the less committing move 11.♗e3.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

10...exd4

Of course, with the typical manoeuvre in the line, opening the long dark diagonal and the e-file.

The attempt to counter with 10...b5? would be inappropriate due to 11.c5!.

11.♘xd4 ♖e8 12.h3

Exercise: What’s the continuation of Black’s idea?

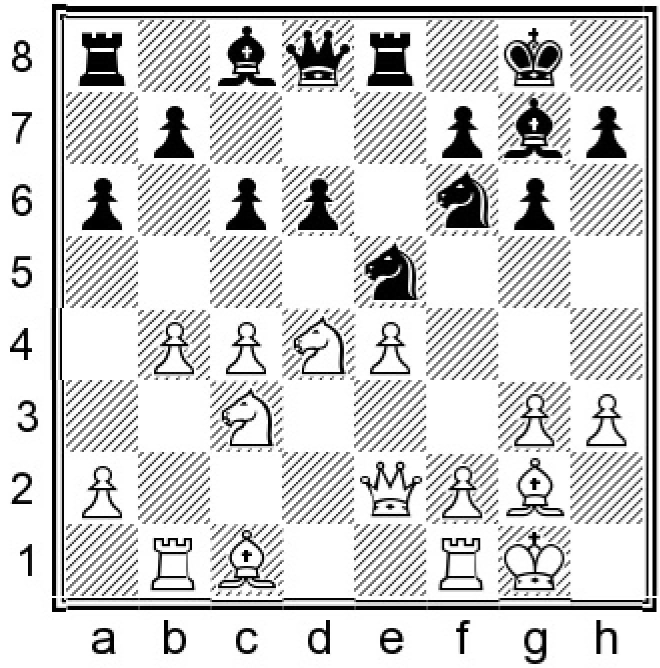
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

12...♘e5

The second part of the idea, aiming at the c4-square, which has been weakened by the impulsive move 10.b4.

13.♕e2



Exercise (simple): What is the culmination of Black’s idea, initiated with 9...a6?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13...b5!

Taking full benefit of the weakness created by 10.b4; the e5-knight gains a strong square on c4.

14.cxb5 cxb5!

Question: With the c-pawn? Isn’t it better to capture with the a-pawn?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Generally speaking, it’s better to capture towards the centre and that what’s Najdorf did, as we have seen. It’s good here too, but Black’s advantage is smaller after 14...axb5 15.♖d1!; on the other hand 15.f4?! would be inaccurate due to 15...♕b6!, which is better than the more complicated

15...♘c4 16.♘xc6 ♕b6+ 17.♕f2 ♕xf2+ 18.♖xf2 ♘xe4! 19.♘xe4 ♗f5 20.♘e5 (not 20.♖e2 d5).

15.♖d1 ♗b7

This is the advantage of recapturing with the c-pawn. The bishop is activated and Black benefits more from the opening of the c-file than the a-file.

16.f4?

Donner opts for “all or nothing”; the weaknesses created can’t be sustained in the long term and the gain of space will prove to be unproductive.

The white position was tenable, but at the cost of remaining passive, either with 16.♗g5 (preventing the regrouping ...♘d7) 16...h6 17.♗xf6 ♗xf6 18.a4, or with the immediate 16.a4.

16...♘c4 17.♕d3

Exercise: If 17.a4 Black would have carried out his main threat – what was it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Exploiting the pin on the e-file with the blow 17...♘xe4!, with advantage to Black after 18.♗xe4 (18.♘xe4 is similar) 18...♗xe4 19.♘xe4 d5.

Exercise: How did Fischer proceed now?

Show/Hide Solution

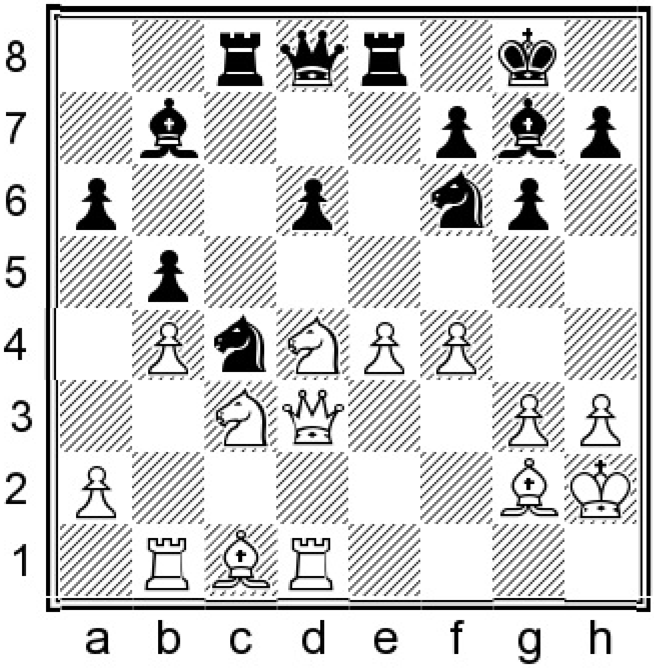
Answer:

17...♖c8

Bringing the only inactive piece into play.

18.♔h2

Possibly one of Donner’s ideas in playing 16.f4 was to advance with 18.e5, but it’s not effective here in view of 18...dxe5 19.♗xb7 exd4, e.g. 20.♕xd4 ♘d7 21.♕xd7 ♕b6+ 22.♔h2 ♗xc3, or 20.♗xc8 ♕xc8! 21.♘e2 ♕xh3 22.♕f3, and now for example 22...h5 with the idea of ...♘g4.



Exercise: White has removed his king from the dangerous g1-a7 diagonal; how did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18...♕c7!

Defending the bishop on b7, strengthening his grip on the c-file and fully justifying his choice of 14...cxb5; now Black is preparing both ...♕b8–a8 and ...♖e7, followed by ...♖ce8.

18...♖c7 was also strong, with similar ideas. Fischer's move also creates the possibility of ...♘a3, which would be strong after 19.♘b3, for example.

19.♖b3

Donner suggested 19.♘d5 as a better defence, but after 19...♘xd5 20.exd5 ♘b6 Black has too many open lines available and White has too many weaknesses; if 21.♘c6 then 21...♘xd5, while after 21.♘b3 the move 21...♕c2 is decisive.

Exercise: How do you think Black continued?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19...♖e7!

With the above-mentioned idea of doubling rooks on the e- file. The other idea, 19...♕b8, intending ...♕a8, was also good, but not quite as strong.

20.♖e1 ♖ce8 21.♘c2

Exercise: If White overprotects e4 with 21.♖e2, Fischer would have replied in the same way - how?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21...♕c8!

Also with an idea mentioned above; Black plans to increase the pressure on e4 with 22...♕a8.

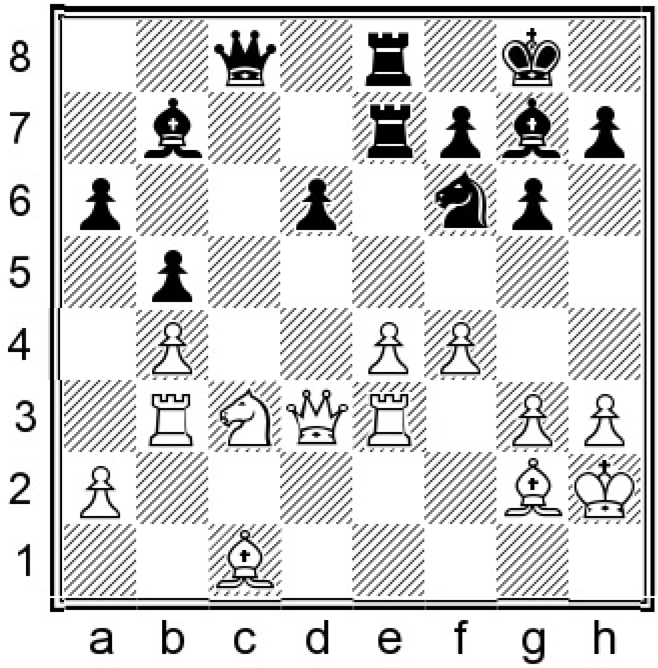
22.♘e3

The “ugly” 22.♘a3 has been suggested, but after 22...♕a8 23.♘xc4 bxc4 24.♕xc4 d5! Black takes control, for instance if 25.♕d3 then 25...d4!, followed by ...♘xe4, and the white position collapses.

22...♘xe3!

22...♕a8 was also strong; the move played has a crushing idea behind it.

23.♖xe3



Exercise: What was the idea behind exchanging on e3?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23...♘xe4!

This blow shows that the pins on the e- and c- file are decisive.

24.♗xe4

If 24.♘xe4 then the simplest is 24...♕xc1, while 24.♖xe4 ♗xe4 25.♗xe4 can be met with, among other things, 25...♕c4!, and White is powerless against 26...♗xc3, followed by capturing the bishop on e4, which is even better than the simple 25...♖xe4 26.♘xe4 ♕xc1.

24...♗xe4 25.♕xd6

Exercise (simple): Although White is lost, this is “the worst of all the possibilities,” according to Donner himself, why?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

25...♖d7

With a decisive win of material.

26.♕c5

If 26.♕b6 then 26...♗d4.

Giving up the queen with 26.♕xd7 ♕xd7 27.♖xe4 is no better, e.g. 27...♗xc3 28.♖xe8+ ♕xe8 29.♖xc3 ♕e2+ 30.♔g1 ♕e1+ and wins.

26...♖c7 27.♘xe4 ♖xc5 28.♘xc5

Exercise (simple): There are several ways to win now and Fischer chose the most crushing - what is it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

28...♗d4!

And the queen infiltrates conclusively.

0–1

Game 30

A dream - and a dream position

In *Timman´s Titans. My World Champions* Jan Timman tells of a talk he had with Fischer in Brussels in 1990.

Timman was impressed by the incredible amount of energy Fischer radiated. “in a similar way as Kasparov does. You felt that energy unloading itself, as it were.”

“And at a certain moment – quite soon, in fact – he took out his magnetic pocket chess set. He had bought it in Germany in 1978. He asked for my attention regarding certain positions he had studied during his flight from LA to Brussels. For the next several hours, our contact consisted of the ideas he showed me on the pocket chess set.”

Fischer expressed his obsessions with pre-arranged games and his one-track political opinions. Timman noted that in general Fischer would accept the replies given even if his opinions were not shared; we know that years later that attitude changed.

He liked the endings that Timman showed him; Timman described Fischer’s understanding as phenomenal: “in a certain rook ending, for example, he suggested a move I hadn’t contemplated at all. Perhaps the move was not entirely correct, but it would have taken thorough analysis to prove that.”

Outside the subject of chess, Timman thought that Fischer’s arguments were naive, and he thought that Fischer’s self-imposed isolation had caused a deterioration in his mental health.

Another visit by Fischer to Brussels was planned for the following month, but Fischer cancelled it a day before it was due to take place.

Timman recalled a long dream he had the previous night, which featured Fischer, Bessel Kok and some other people. In this dream Fischer showed Kok his game against Durão and told him that any amateur could understand it.

Timman remarked that the dream reflected his unconscious wish to see Fischer again, something which never happened.

About the game in the dream, Mark Dvoretsky commented: “Fischer’s play creates a highly artistic impression. It is instructive to follow how he exchanged the pieces that he did not need, strengthened to the maximum the placing of his remaining pieces, and finally landed a decisive blow.”

Robert Fischer
Joaquim Durão
King’s Indian Attack [A04]
Havana Olympiad, Preliminary Group C (3), 28.10.1966

1.e4 e6 2.d3

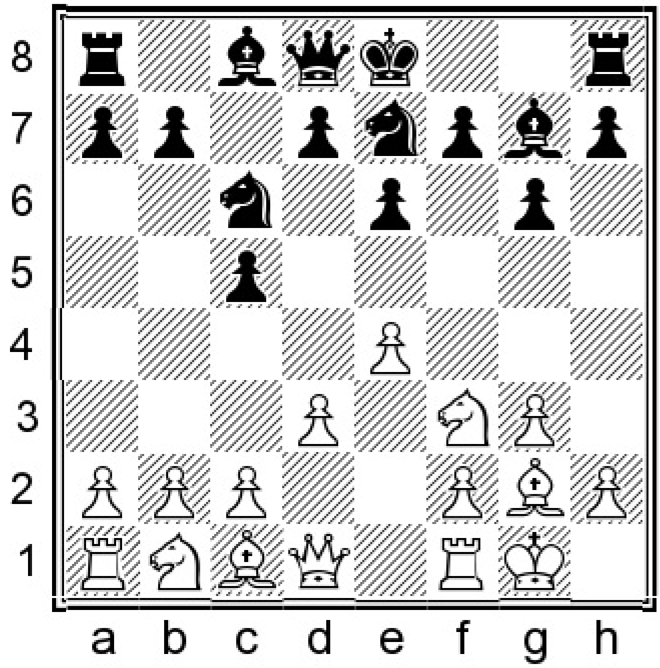
Question: Why did Fischer sometimes choose such an unambitious move as this?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: I wouldn’t say that it’s unambitious. Fischer explained that he believed that it led to a King’s Indian with colours reversed where White (Black in this case) has chosen a weak variation.

Fischer played several brilliant games with this line, with some arising from a Sicilian move order, 1.e4 1...c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d3, as we shall see, and some naturally also with Black in the Classical King’s Indian.

2...c5 3.♘f3 ♘c6 4.g3 g6 5.♗g2 ♗g7 6.0-0 ♘ge7



7.c3

In Buenos Aires 1970 against Panno, where, in Kasparov’s opinion, Fischer “made one of the prettiest moves in his career,” Fischer preferred to start with 7.♖e1 and after 7...d6 8.c3 0-0 9.d4 cxd4 10.cxd4 d5 11.e5 he reached the same position as on move 8 in this game but with an extra tempo, as Black played ...d5 in two moves, and the white rook is on e1.

7...0-0

There are good arguments in favour of 7...e5, indicated by both Timman and Kasparov; White is unable to exploit Black’s loss of time in playing ...e5 in two moves.

8.d4 d6?!

The most usual response is 8...cxd4 9.cxd4 d5 10.e5 and now 10...♘f5 (or 10...f6) 11.♘c3 f6 12.♖e1, played e.g. in Ljubojević - Timman, Hilversum 1973.

Exercise: Black didn’t want to exchange on d4 yet so as not to allow White to develop his queen’s knight to c3, but in fact Durão’s move is a slight inaccuracy - why?

Show/Hide Solution

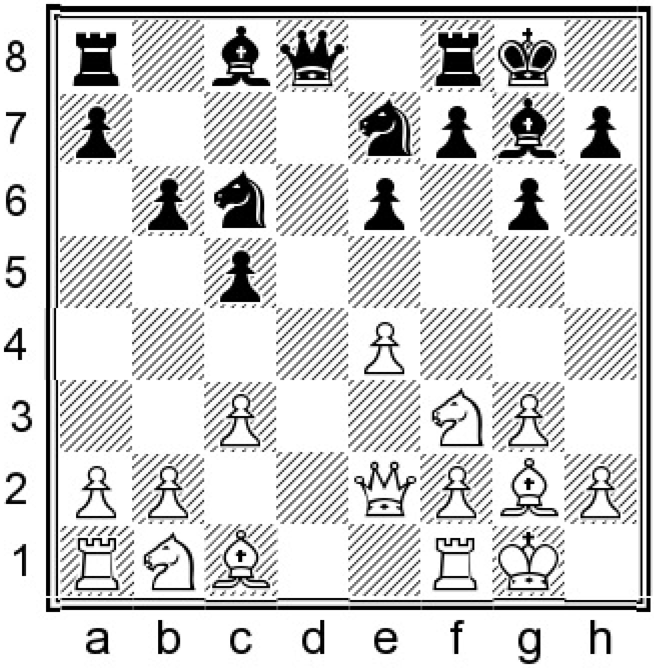
Answer:

9.dxc5!

After this exchange White gains good squares for his pieces.

Black, as we shall see, also gains some good squares, but is unable to derive similar benefit.

9...dxc5 10.♕e2 b6



Exercise: What did Fischer play at this point?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

11.e5!

Better than “gaining a tempo” with 11.♖d1?!, as Black can respond with 11...♗a6.

It’s certain that objectively 11.e5 gives White no advantage, but on the other hand it complicates the game positionally and forces Black to “think with his own little head,” as Najdorf used to say.

Question: In view of the fact that this is a very committing decision, wouldn’t it be better to continue with development?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The current engines agree with you, preferring 11.♘a3. In general it is difficult to know whether the moment has come to take a decision which disturbs the positional and/or material balance, or whether one can or should continue to manoeuvre, waiting for a better moment.

After exchanging on c5, Fischer has taken another important decision about the structure. With this advance he gains space in the centre, he controls f6 and d6 and vacates the e4-square for his pieces. One the other hand he concedes the d5-square, but as Najdorf (and Fischer too, each in their own language) used to say: “To get squares you have to give up squares!”.

As Timman indicated, “(...) White’s e-pawn can become weak. Granted, it would have required very accurate play by Black to take advantage of this.”

11...a5

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

12.♖e1

This is the best square for the rook, overprotecting e5.

12...♗a6 13.♕e4 ♖a7 14.♘bd2 ♗d3 15.♕h4

Black has been making natural and correct moves and is fine, but now he commits another inaccuracy.

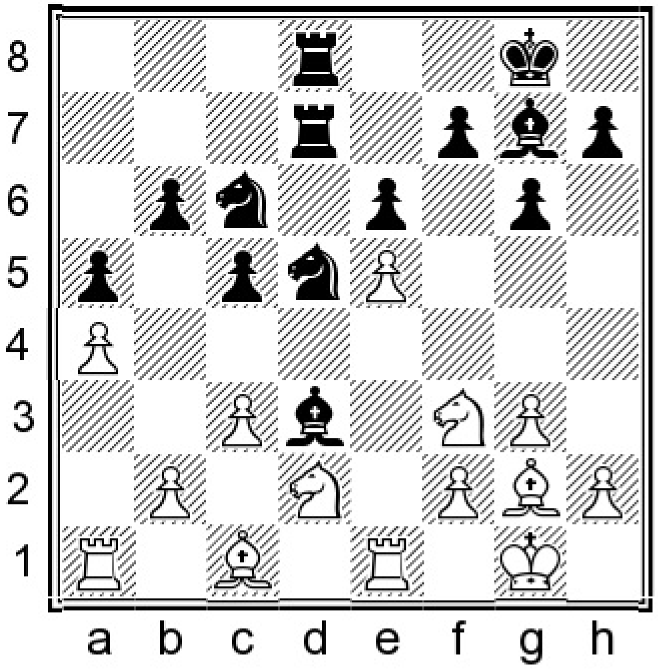
15...♘d5

This move isn’t bad, but it’s not the strongest; 15...♘f5! Would have created more difficulties for White, with the idea of following 16.♕xd8 ♖xd8 17.a4 with 17...♖d5, as indicated by Timman; White would continue in similar fashion to the game and his advantage would be minimal.

16.♕xd8 ♖xd8 17.a4 ♖ad7?!

This is the last moment where Black squanders a chance to disturb the quiet course of the game.

This is one of the moments mentioned in the note to 11.e5. More chances were offered by the counter-blow 17...g5!, exchanging the pawn on g5 for the one on e5.



Question: But despite the inaccuracies, it doesn’t appear that the black position is inferior, does it? He dominates the d-file, all his pieces are on good squares and there are no white threats. What’s wrong with this reasoning?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Mark Dvoretsky replies: “Black’s pieces are actively placed, and therefore it may seem that he stands quite well. But in fact in his position there are rather many weak squares, and this factor gives White a great positional advantage...”

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18.♗f1!

Deciding which piece to exchange and which to retain can considerably change the evaluation of the position.

“Fischer begins the processing of these weaknesses with the exchange of the light-square bishops.” (Dvoretsky).

“Surprisingly enough, the computer considers that White only has a slight advantage here.

However, Fischer now shows in an instructive way how such a position can be converted into a win. First, he wants to exchange the strong black bishop.” (Timman).

18...♗xf1

If 18...♗c2 then 19.♗b5, followed by 20.♘c4, is strong.

19.♔xf1 ♘de7?!

The position is already uncomfortable for Black. Faced with the imminent threat of 20.♘c4, the black knight goes to c8 to defend b6 and d6, but this is a very passive plan. It is easy to suggest 19...h6, but not how to continue after that.

20.♘c4 ♘c8

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21.♗g5!

Creating more discomfort for Black; in order not to lose control of the d-file he must consent to a pin.

21...♘6e7

Exercise: What happened now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22.♘fd2!

“All quite intricate. The king’s knight strives for e4.” (Timman).

22...h6

Exercise (simple): What do you think Fischer decided to do with his bishop?

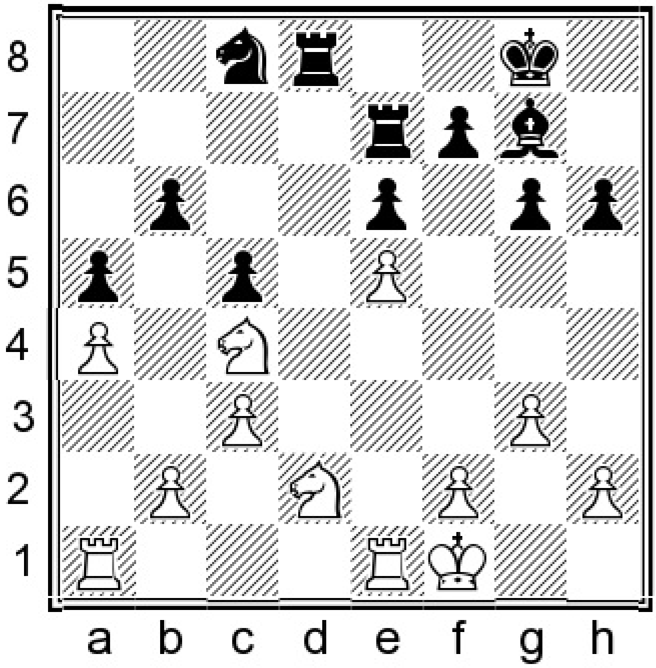
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23.♗xe7

Of course; this was one of the ideas of 21.♗g5; once again Fischer responds in the best way to the question of which pieces to exchange, following the principle that “what matters is not the pieces that are exchanged, but the ones that are left on the board”: here the white knights are more effective than the bishop Fischer has exchanged.

23...♖xe7



Exercise: How to continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24.♖a3!

The ♘e4 leap can wait; first the inactive rook finds the best way to become active - it goes to b3, to put pressure on the pawn at b6 and deprive the black pieces of mobility.

24...♖c7 25.♖b3 ♖c6 26.♘e4 ♗f8 27.♔e2 ♗e7

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

28.f4

Gaining more space for free, before taking any other decisions.

Question: Black has only one active piece, the rook on d8. So why didn't White exchange it with 28.♖d1?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Here we have another case of correct evaluation of which piece to exchange: the black rook seems to stand well on d8, commanding the open file, but it has no way to infiltrate the white position.

White's task now will be seek a better role for the king's rook.

28...♔f8

Exercise: How did Fischer continue to make progress?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29.g4!

The weakness at b6 isn't enough for White to win; he needs to create another weakness, or open another front. A timely f5-break is one of the ideas, but not the only one.

Going back a move, 28...h5 is an obvious improvement, but after 29.h3, preparing for a timely g4, White would keep the advantage.

29...♔e8

Exercise (simple): What to play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

30.♖f1

This rook has found a more productive task than the one on d8.

30...♖d5 31.♖f3 ♖d8?

An error that makes White’s task easier.

It was preferable to play 31...♔f8, after which Timman thinks that Fischer would have played 32.♖a3, to involve the rook in the offensive in the centre and on the kingside.

Exercise (simple): How can White punish Black’s error?

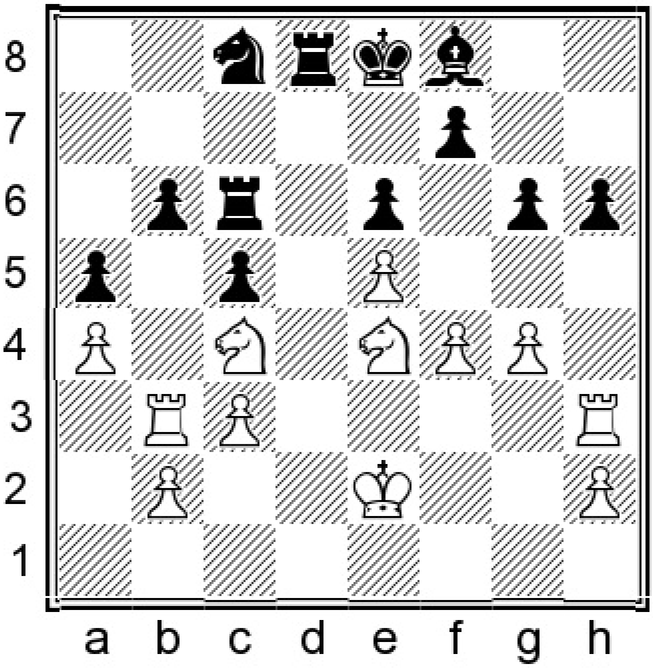
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

32.♖h3

Forcing Black to give up the defence of the f6-square.

32...♗f8



Exercise (simple): There are several ways for White to win now. Which is the strongest and simplest way?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

33.♘xa5!

Of course, as 33...bxa5? loses to 34.♘f6+ and mate.

33...♖c7 34.♘c4 ♖a7 35.♘xb6 ♘xb6 36.♖xb6

With two extra pawns and more weaknesses in the black camp. The rest is very simple.

36...♖da8 37.♘f6+ ♔d8 38.♖c6 ♖c7 39.♖d3+ ♔c8 40.♖xc7+ ♔xc7 41.♖d7+ ♔c6 42.♖xf7 c4 43.♘d7 ♗c5 44.♘xc5 ♔xc5 45.♖c7+ ♔d5

Exercise (simple): Timman commented: “Durão has been playing on for much too long [i.e. in a clearly resignable position], but in doing so he has made this nice final move possible.” What was it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

46.b4!

If 46...cxb3 then 47.♔d3, and there is no good answer to the threat of c4 mate.

“A model game.” (Timman).

1–0

Game 31

Bobby Fischer, a promising singer

In the book that we have already quoted, *My Secrets in the Ruy Lopez*, Lajos Portisch talks on more than one occasion about Fischer, from their first meeting over the board in Bled 1961 to their conversations more than thirty years later in Budapest, where Fischer stayed for some time after his second match against Spassky in 1992.

Fischer is also mentioned in the book *Checkmate! The Love Story of Mikhail Tal and Sally Landau*. Tal’s wife met Fischer at the 1962 Curaçao Candidates Tournament, when Fischer was 19. After stating that the American genius lived in his own world, devoted only to chess and unable to fit into social life, Sally commented: “Fischer had to be accepted for what he was, without imposing any external standards on him. You had to get used to him, and then you would discover a kind and warm human being.” Sally was an artist; she played the piano and sang, etc. She therefore knew something about music, and added: “He was an amusing guy. A local millionaire invited us to a little restaurant on the other side of the island. Fischer sat in the car next to me and turned the radio on. He found a station where some guy was singing and suddenly began to sing loudly alongside him. He was tone deaf! A truly awful voice! And then he said to me in total seriousness, “If I weren’t such a great chess player, I would have become a great singer.”

Evidently Fischer was convinced that he had a melodious voice. Where did he get that idea? We have two pieces of information:

In the aforementioned book, Portisch talks about Fischer several times. For example, he writes: “Our first encounter was in Bled 1961. (...) right from the beginning there was some kind of sympathy between us. One evening after the games we went to a night-club, where Bobby wanted to sing (he thought that he was a man of genius for anything).

I have had a musical background and a knowledge of singing technique since my childhood, so I warned him: “Bobby, you’d better not do that.” In my opinion it was ridiculous, but he nevertheless performed with a great success. Obviously everybody there knew that he was the great Bobby Fischer.”

Returning to Sally Landau’s book, it contains part of an interview with Mikhail Tal in 64 magazine in 1979. It tells the story of when Fischer was very young (possibly sixteen years old) he sang a few bars while he was with Smyslov, who was an excellent baritone, and also very polite and kind. Smyslov told him he was very talented. And it seems that Fischer really was convinced that he could sing well and he never changed his mind about it.

“During the tournament in Bled we played a little trick on him. One evening, we all gathered in a bar where an orchestra was playing, accompanying a singer. Somebody had a word with the compere and we heard him announce “Ladies and gentlemen! We are going to be treated to a performance by the amazing American chess player and singer Robert James Fischer!”. Fischer got all shy but nevertheless took the microphone. He sang, let’s say, idiosyncratically. The audience nevertheless gave him a huge ovation. He then headed back to his seat, accepting the congratulations, and stopped by Paul Keres’s table. Keres told him, “You should give up chess and switch to singing.” Whereupon Fischer replied: “Yes, I know, but I am too good at chess.”

Let us return to chess, where Fischer truly was a star, at the 1966 Havana Olympiad. There Fischer employed for the first time the Exchange Variation of the Ruy Lopez Opening. He played it three times and scored three wins with it.

Let’s look at the first of these.

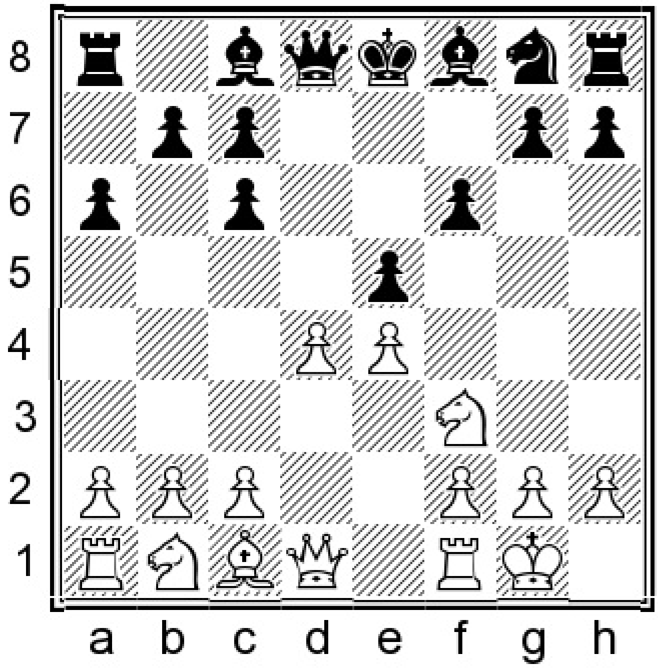
Robert Fischer
Lajos Portisch
Ruy Lopez [C69]
Havana Olympiad, Final A (6), 10.11.1966

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.0-0

This was always Fischer’s preference. On the other hand the first great promoter of this variation, Emanuel Lasker, used to prefer 5.d4 or else delay a decision about the destiny of his monarch by playing 5.♘c3; he only played 5.0-0 once, at the beginning of de his career.

Evidently Fischer had another approach.

5...f6 6.d4



6...exd4

Subsequently Portisch played exclusively 6...♗g4, which he considered best. Fischer also considered this to be the strongest response.

This was the choice of Svetozar Gligorić in the 8th round and Eleazar Jiménez in the 13th round. On both occasions there followed 7.c3 exd4 8.cxd4 ♕d7 9.h3, and it was only here that play diverged; Gligorić retreated his bishop to e6 and Jiménez to h5; Fischer won cleanly in both cases.

Subsequently Fischer opted for 7.dxe5, acquiescing to the endgame; against Rubinetti in Buenos Aires 1970 and against Spassky in their first match in 1972.

7.♘xd4 c5 8.♘b3

Fischer played this successfully in the 9th game of the second Fischer - Spassky match in 1992, and wins in only 21 moves, but in the 27th game, anticipating an improvement from Spassky, Fischer deviated with 8.♘de2.

8...♕xd1 9.♖xd1 ♗d6

> **Question:** Isn't it better to play 9...♗d7 immediately, to castle on the queenside as soon as possible?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: This isn't clear; 9...♗d7 can be answered with 10.♗f4 0-0-0 11.♘c3, with the idea of ♘d5, and White has all his pieces into play, unlike Black.

Instead of this move Kasparov indicated the line 9...♗g4 (forcing the weakening of the g1-a7 diagonal) 10.f3 ♗e6, and this was the line chosen by Spassky in the 9th game of their 1992 match.

Exercise: How did Fischer respond to 9...♗d6?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

10.♘a5!

This strong leap hinders the development of the c8-bishop and plans 11.♘c4.

10...b5

This solves both problems, but at the cost of weakening the black structure.

Exercise: Can’t Black employ tactics to help his developmental and play 10...♗g4 11.f3 0-0-0? What’s wrong with that?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: White eschews 12.fxg4? due to 12...♗xh2+, but instead he can win with the intermediate move 12.e5!.

Exercise: How did Fischer demonstrate the negative side of 10...b5?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

11.c4!

Fixing the c5-pawn, which becomes as an object of attack.

In Pérez - Spassky, Havana 1962, White preferred 11.a4, which is less challenging.

11...♘e7

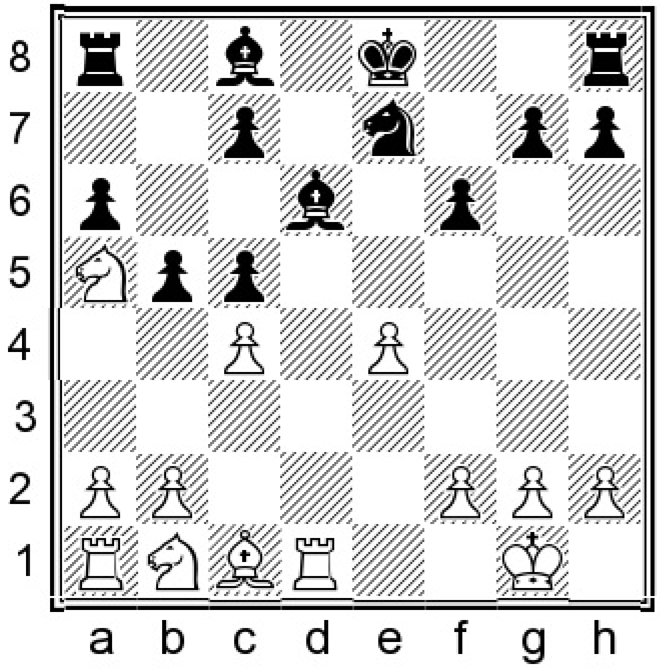
In Portisch’s annotations in his book one can see the great influence that computer analysis is having on today’s chess. He commented that the move which the current engines consider the strongest, 11...♘h6, never even occurred to him at the time.

In fact though, the strange thing would be if that move had occurred to him, as in normal circumstances allowing 12.♗xh6 would only be the result of desperation. (12...gxh6)

However, the current engines consider that it is quite playable and Portisch commented: “maybe this is the continuation to cause the most difficult decision for White. The position is not that simple, lines are opening and the bishop-pair fights against the pair of knights. Perhaps this circumstance may balance the terrible pawn structure. For example: 13.♘c3 ♔f7 14.♖ac1 ♖g8, with an unclear position.”

14.♖d3 ♖e8 15.f3 f5 or 14.a4 also fails to cause problems, since with 14...bxa4! Black gains counterplay along the b-file.

Less challenging are 12.♘c3 ♘g4 13.h3 ♘e5 and 12.h3 ♘f7 13.♗e3 0-0, with much better play than in the game, according to Portisch.



Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

12.♗e3!

Immediately starting to put pressure on c5-pawn. This move was a novelty at the time. Previously White had played 12.♘c3, but this move is more direct and better, as the b1-knight retains the possibility of going to d2 and b3.

Question: Well, looking at it like that, it seems quite obvious Fischer's move is better, doesn't it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Not really, because, as we shall see, this move also requires tactical justification.

12...f5

Portisch plays the most challenging response. He commented that he felt forced to play actively, because White was planning to attack the weak queenside pawns immediately, e.g. if 12...♔f7 White would demonstrate the strength of his innovation with 13.♘d2! ♖e8 14.♘db3, giving White the initiative.

13.♘c3 f4

Black plays according to his plan; Portisch indicated that after the natural 13...0-0 there were many complicated lines which were difficult to foresee:

He analysed various possibilities: 14.e5, 14.♖ac1, 14.f3 (which leaves Black with a permanent weakness on c5), and 14.f4, which "would be the most concrete reply," when after 14...fxe4 15.♘xe4, "the computer's cheeky suggestion 15...♖e8 may be the only way to fight for equality."

From the practical viewpoint, over the board it is difficult to find the best lines given by the computers, and when this game was played both 11...♘h6 and several of the complex lines quoted by Portisch in his book would have been almost unthinkable, because they would have looked so anti-positional.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply to the counter-blow 13...f4 played by Portisch?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

14.e5!

A strong intermediate move; "Fischer obviously had it in mind when he played 12.♗e3," wrote Portisch.

14.♗d2 was less energetic, relieving the pressure on the c5-pawn, although the bishop could resume its pressure after a later f3 and ♗e1.

Question: With the exchange of the pawns on e5 and c5 lines are opened; isn't that something which generally favours the two bishops?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Generally, yes, but not in this case, since, as we shall see immediately, it will be White's pieces that benefit more than Black's, because they will gain more useful squares.

14...♗xe5

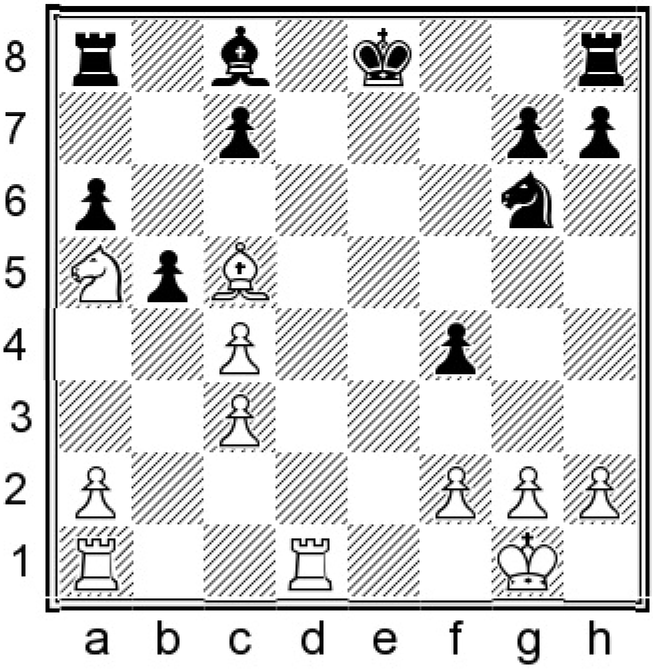
After the alternative 14...fxe3 15.exd6 exf2+ 16.♔xf2 0-0+ 17.♔g1 cxd6 18.♖xd6, the white pieces are very active, whereas Black's are uncoordinated.

15.♗xc5

The threat of 16.♖e1 practically forces Black to give up the bishop pair.

15...♗xc3 16.bxc3 ♘g6?!

Portisch considered that this was the last critical moment of the game. He suggested 16...♔f7 as an improvement, when 17.♖d4 ♘g6 isn't dangerous, since the h8-rook is now ready to come into play, while "17.♗xe7 ♔xe7 18.♖d5 ♗e6 19.♖c5 ♔f6 might have offered much better practical chances of survival," according to Portisch. But this still favours White, who also has other interesting options, such as 18.h4, with the plan of attacking the f4-pawn with 19.♖d4, followed by ♖e1.



Exercise: What's the snag with Black's last move?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17.♘c6!

"Although it seems that I am able to stabilise the position, the penetrating knight will be decisive," commented Portisch.

The knight invades the black camp, creating great discomfort.

17...♗e6

17...♗d7 has been suggested, but something similar would followed, although the engines find some hidden tactical resources, which we shall examine further on.

18.cxb5 axb5

Exercise: What now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19.♘a7!

White not only attacks the b5-pawn but also prepares other ways to infiltrate, as we shall see.

Going back, after 17...♗d7 White could also continue with 18.cxb5 axb5 19.♘a7, when "Black is almost in zugzwang," according to Portisch, although the engines suggest the surprising 19...♖f8, when instead of 20.♗xf8 ♘xf8 21.♖xd7 ♔xd7 22.♘xb5 c5! it is better to maintain the pressure with 20.♖d5, intending ♖e1+, and after e.g. 20...♖f6 21.♖e1+ ♖e6 22.♖ed1, or 21.♗d4 ♖e6 22.♘xb5 ♗xb5 23.♖xb5 ♖xa2 24.♖ab1, White stands better, as his bishop is stronger than the knight and also the black monarch is vulnerable.

19...♖b8

After 19...♗c4 Portisch indicated the immediate opening of the queenside with 20.a4, which gives White the advantage after e.g. 20...bxa4 (20...♗b3 allows the creation of a passed pawn after 21.♖e1+ ♔f7 22.a5) 21.♖xa4 ♗e6 22.♖a6 ♔f7 23.♖c6.

Boleslavsky suggested 20.♖d4, with ideas of 21.a4 as well as 21.♖e1, which also gives some advantage.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20.♖db1

After several direct, simple-looking moves, White is achieving something tangible, and wins a pawn; if 20...♗c4 then 21.a4.

20...♔f7 21.♘xb5 ♖hd8

Exercise: "From here Fischer converts his advantage into victory with his famous technique," commented Portisch. What do you think he played?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

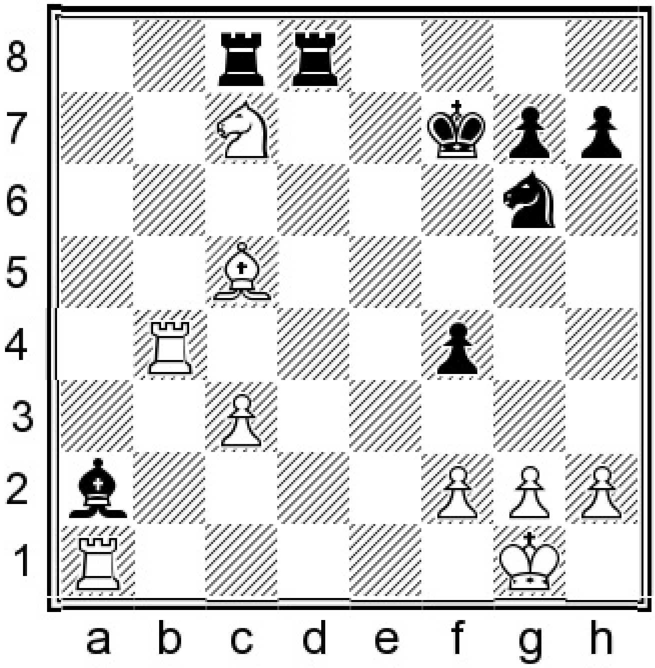
22.♖b4!

A good alternative was 22.a4 ♖d5 23.♗d4 but Fischer prefers to activate all his pieces, opening more lines with an exchange of pawns.

22...♗xa2

If 22...♖d5? then 23.♘xc7.

23.♘xc7 ♖bc8



Exercise: How did Fischer continue to make progress?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24.h4!

By giving the king an escape square, White threatens 25.♖xa2 and plans an opportune h5; now 24...♖xc7? fails to 25.♗b6, and wins the exchange.

24...♖d2 25.♗b6

Threatening 26.h5.

25...f3

With this advance Black is trying to complicate the game, but in fact it makes White's task easier. But even after 25...h5 White's advantage would be difficult to neutralise; then 26.♖b5 is one possibility and 26.♖a4 ♖b8 27.♗d4 ♖b1+ 28.♖xb1 ♗xb1 29.♖a7 is another.

Exercise: How did Fischer punish Black for his last move?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

26.♗e3!

By occupying this square, which is now available, forcing the attacked rook to move to a worse square; 26.♘b5! and 26.h5! were also strong.

26...♖e2

Exercise (simple): What now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

27.♘b5

With the threats of 28.♘d6+ and 28.♘d4.

27...♖a8 28.h5

More direct than the also appropriate 28.♘d4.

28...♘e5 29.♖f4+ ♔e7

The king in the centre is a new weakness; 29...♔g8 was more resilient, but would not have changed the result.

30.♖d1

With the threat of 31.♗c5+; the rest is simple.

30...♖c8 31.♖e4 ♔f6 32.♖d6+ ♔f5 33.♖f4+ ♔g5 34.♖xf3+

1–0

Game 32

Eighth and final triumph

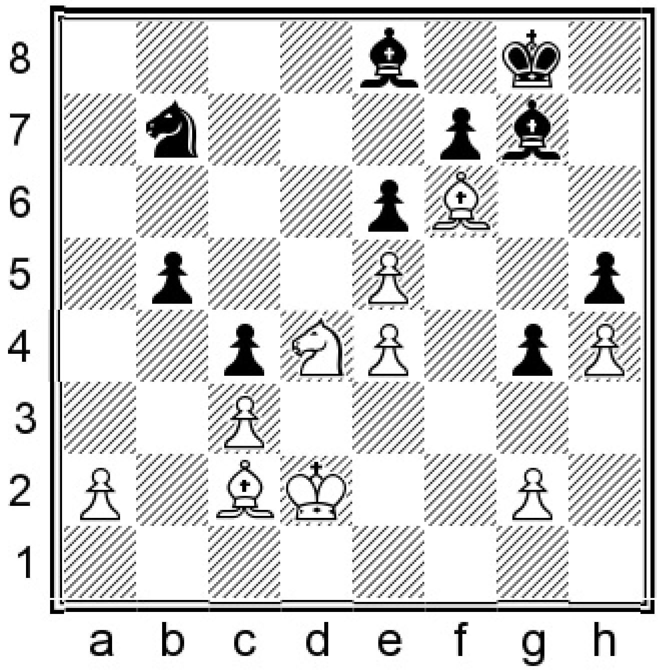
The 1966-67 US Championship was the last national tournament Fischer played in, his eighth win in eight tries.

He won with ease, with 9½ points out of 11, two points ahead of Larry Evans in second place.

Let’s look at the final part of his last game, played in a Lasker-like spirit, in other words overcoming his opponent from an equal position, a style which is seen nowadays in the games of Magnus Carlsen.

Arthur Bisguier
Robert Fischer
Sicilian Defence [B50]
US Championship, New York (11), 12.1966

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.c3 ♘f6 4.♗d3 ♘c6 5.♗c2 ♗g4 6.d3 g6 7.♘bd2 ♗g7 8.h3 ♗d7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♘h2 b5 11.f4 b4 12.♘c4 d5 13.♘e5 bxc3 14.bxc3 dxe4 15.dxe4 ♘xe5 16.fxe5 ♘e8 17.♘f3 ♘c7 18.♖f2 ♗b5 19.♗g5 ♕xd1+ 20.♖xd1 ♖fe8 21.♗b3 c4 22.♗c2 ♘e6 23.♗e3 ♖eb8 24.♖b1 a6 25.♖ff1 ♗e8 26.♔f2 ♘d8 27.♖xb8 ♖xb8 28.♖b1 ♖b5 29.♖xb5 axb5 30.♔e2 h6 31.♔d2 g5 32.h4 g4 33.♘d4 e6 34.♗f4 h5 35.♗g5 ♘b7 36.♗f6



Black to play

The difficulty is to know whether Black has any real winning chances, because unless he makes a serious mistake he can’t lose, yet at first glance there are not many grounds for optimism. The black monarch seems to have no way to come into play and the bishop on e8 doesn’t seem to have a great future.

Exercise: How did Fischer retain winning chances?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

36...♗h6+

The only way to continue. Black has no winning chances after 36...♗xf6? 37.exf6, with the idea of e5, and now if 37...♘c5? then 38.e5 ♘d7 39.♘xb5 ♘xe5 40.♘d6 ♗c6 41.g3, followed by a4, and the advantage lies with White; 37...e5 is preferable, but after 38.♘f5 ♔h7 39.♘g7! ♗d7 40.♘xh5 White isn't worse.

37.♗g5?!

A significant inaccuracy; 37.♔e2 was better, and although Black has various plans available and can force White to play accurately, it isn't clear whether Black can achieve anything concrete.

For instance, in the event of 37...♘c5, with the idea of ...♘d7, White needs to to play carefully, as 38.♔f2? allows infiltration with 38...♗d2 39.♘e2 ♘d3+ 40.♔f1 b4!, and White has serious problems.

Nor is it adequate to simply wait with 38.g3 (preventing a future ...♗f4), since Black takes the lead with 38...♘d7! 39.♘xb5 ♘xf6 and now if 40.♘d6 Black has 40...♗f8!, and wins, but 40.♘c7 looks better.

Exercise: How should Black continue after 40.♘c7?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Black gains a decisive material advantage with 40...♗a4! 41.♗xa4 ♘xe4.

Nevertheless, after 37...♘c5 White can play 38.♗e7!, and Black must retreat, without having made any progress.

Instead of 37...♘c5 Black could try 37...♗f4 or 37...♔h7, and keep pressing, but the white position seems to hold, because Black is unable to gain enough activity and/or coordination, at least not in any clear way.

37...♗xg5+ 38.hxg5

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

38...♔g7

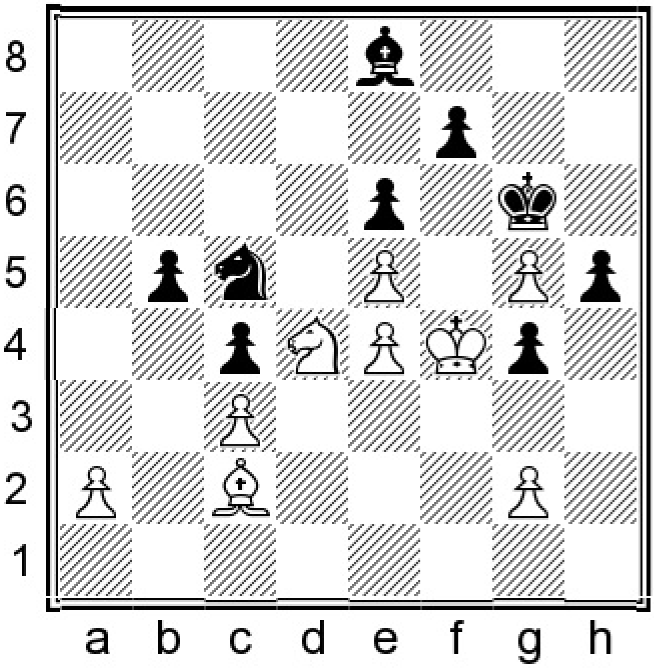
Of course, first of all he activated his king to attack the new weakness on g5.

Question: But White can defends it easily with his king, so does this really constitute progress?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes, it does. It's not important yet, but in general reducing the mobility of an enemy piece is a step forward.

39.♔e3 ♔g6 40.♔f4 ♘c5



41.g3?

Question: So you consider 41.g3 to be a bad move? Really? It seems to me that stopping future ...h4 is no bad thing.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Contrary to appearances, this move seriously worsens the white position, and for a reason that will probably surprise you; it's because... it weakens h3! We'll explain this further on.

It's understandable that White should want to leave his bishop on c2, from where it defends the e4-pawn as well as monitoring the access of the black knight to a4. However, after 41.♗b1! the knight invasion isn't so serious, since after 41...♘a4 42.♘e2 ♘b2 43.♘c1! (not 43.♗c2? ♘d3+, and wins)

43...♘d1 44.♘e2, Black achieves nothing positive.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

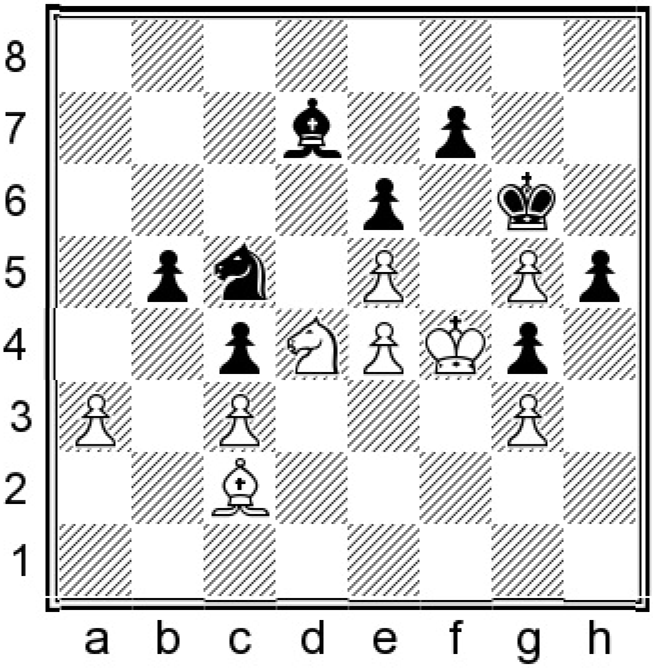
Answer:

41...♗d7!

White has no problems holding the ending after 41...♘d3+? 42.♗xd3 cxd3 43.♘b3 ♗c6 44.♘d2 ♗b7 45.♘b3, when the only try is 45...h4, but after 46.gxh4 ♔h5 47.♔g3 ♗xe4 48.♘d2 White has a fortress and Black can make no progress.

42.a3

If White plays 42.♗b1 there are differences with the previous line, as we shall see later.



Exercise: How did Fischer continue to make progress?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

42...♗e8!

With this modest but deadly waiting move. We should note that White is almost in zugzwang; the king must defend the g5-pawn, while 43.♘e2?! fails to 43...♘d3+!, so the only thing he can do is move the bishop, which will be unable to control both the entry squares at a4 and d3 at the same time.

43.♗b1 ♘a4

Question: But you've just shown me that letting the black knight in wasn't dangerous.

Show/Hide Solution

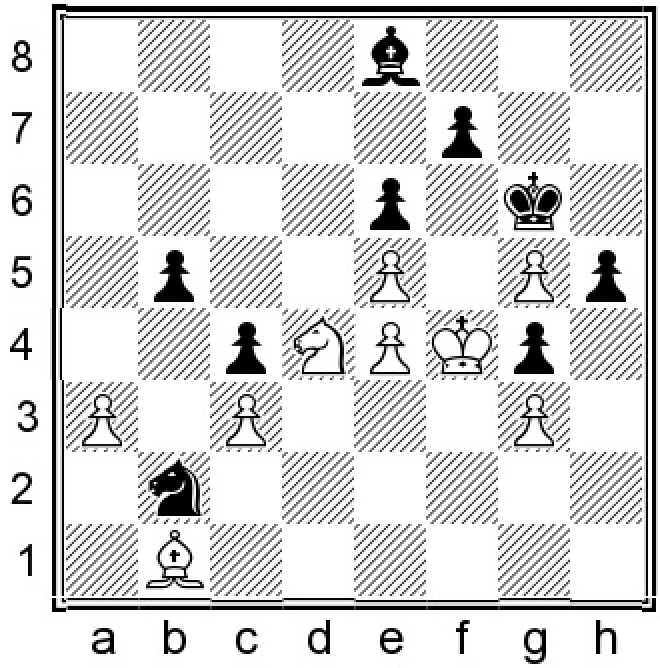
Answer: There are differences with the other position we examined, as we shall see.

44.♘e2 ♘b2

Threatening ...♘d3+.

45.♘d4

If 45.♘c1 meets the same response.



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

45...♘d1!

We have already seen this knight manoeuvre; previously it was harmless, but not now.

46.♘e2 ♘f2 47.♔e3

Exercise (simple): What is the culmination of Fischer’s manoeuvre?

Show/Hide Solution

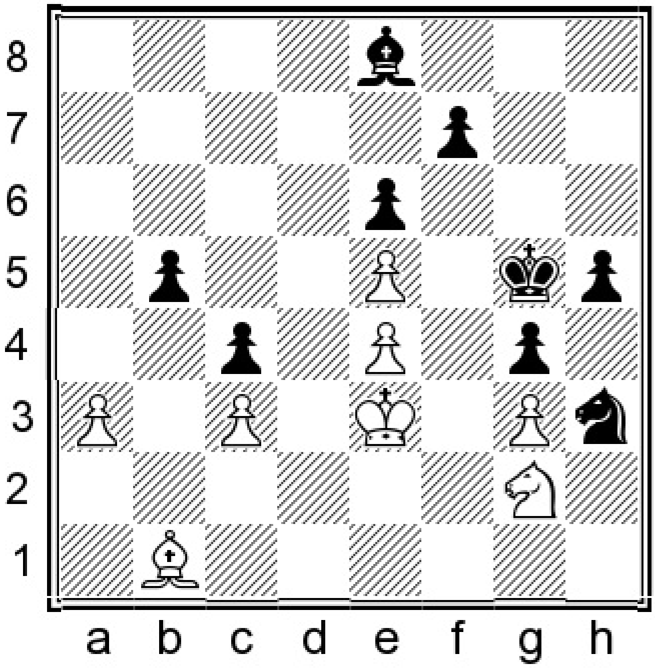
Answer:

47...♘h3

This is the ‘new’ move, which now wins a pawn. Black will capture the pawn on g5, thanks to having access to h3, which was only possible after the move 41.g3?

48.♘f4+ ♔xg5 49.♘g2

There is no defence after 49.♘xh3+ gxh3 50.♔f2 h4 51.gxh4+ ♔xh4 52.♔f3 h2 53.♔g2 ♔g4 54.♔xh2 ♔f4, not with intention of capturing on e5, but aiming for a quicker win by playing 55...♔e3, 56...♔d2, etc.



Black has won a pawn, but victory is still a long way off.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

49...f6!

It’s necessary to open lines, to create space to manoeuvre and to bring the e8-bishop into play.

50.exf6 ♔xf6 51.♘h4

The white king is needed for defence; there is nothing to be gained by venturing into enemy camp with 51.♔d4 e5+ 52.♔c5, allowing Black to play 52...♘g1 and ...♘e2, or 52...♘f2 and ...♘h1.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue to make progress?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

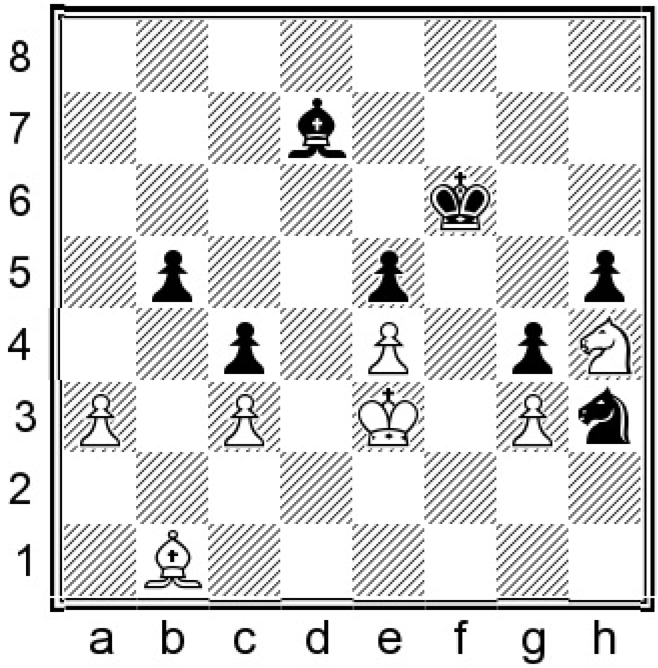
51...e5!

Finally the bishop starts to play!

52.♗c2

It’s important that the knight is also unable to achieve anything by entering the enemy camp: after 52.♘f5 ♗d7 53.♘d6 ♔e7 the knight must move further away or to play 54.♘f5+, which leads to a lost ending after 54...♗xf5 55.exf5 ♘g5, followed by ...♔f6 and ...♘f7-d6.

52...♗d7 53.♗b1



Exercise: How did Black continue here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

53...♘g5!

The knight was no longer doing anything useful on h3. Now Black initiates a plan to break the blockade on the kingside.

54.♗c2 ♘f7 55.♗b1

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

55...♘h8!

Heading for g6, to expel or eliminate the blockading knight.

56.♗c2 ♘g6 57.♘xg6

In the event of 57.♔f2 Black would play 57...♔g5 58.♘g2 h4, opening the way.

57...♔xg6 58.♔f2 ♔g5 59.♔g2 h4 60.♔h2

Exercise (simple): How to proceed now?

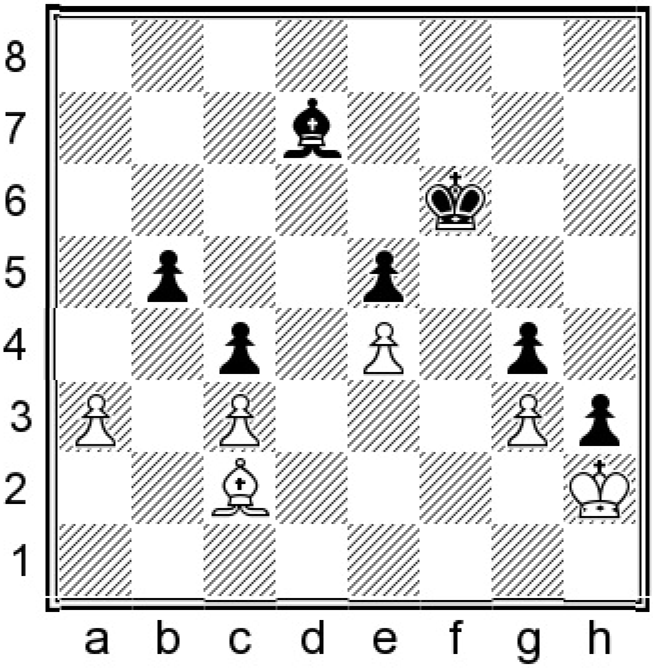
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

60...h3!

Of course, not with 60...hxg3+?? 61.♔xg3, which would be a draw. Black would be unable to penetrate. Following the move played, the white king will be tied down to preventing the further advance of the pawn on h3.

61.♔g1 ♔f6 62.♔h2



Black must now look for a way for his king to enter.

Exercise: What manoeuvre did Fischer begin now?

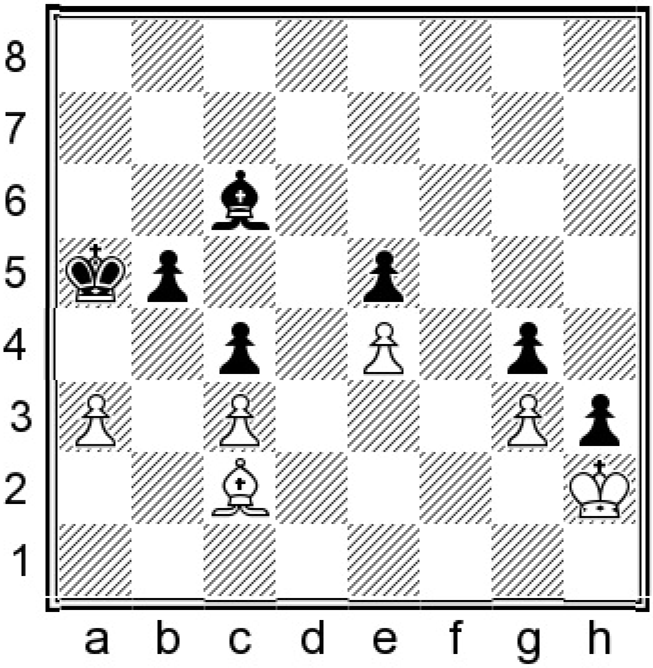
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

62...♔e7!

Heading for a5, to try to enter via a4.

63.♔g1 ♔d6 64.♔f2 ♔c5 65.♔g1 ♔b6 66.♔h1 ♔a5 67.♔g1 ♗c6 68.♔h2



The order of the last few moves was of no importance. We have reached a critical position. Black has a winning ending and the next task is to win it, and do so in the way that gives the fewest chances to the opponent.

Exercise: What did Fischer play here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

68...♗b7!

The most precise move; there were other ways to win but, as we shall see, it suits Black for the white king to be on the back rank.

69.♔g1

Black also wins after 69.♗d1 ♗xe4 70.♗xg4 ♔a4 71.♗d7!? ♗g2! 72.g4 e4 73.g5 e3 and the bishop is forced to retreat, when after 74.♗g4 Black can win the pawn race in several ways, with 74...♔xa3 or with 74...♔b3, to take on c3, because Black always has ...♗d5 to control the white pawn.

Exercise: What did Fischer play here?

Show/Hide Solution

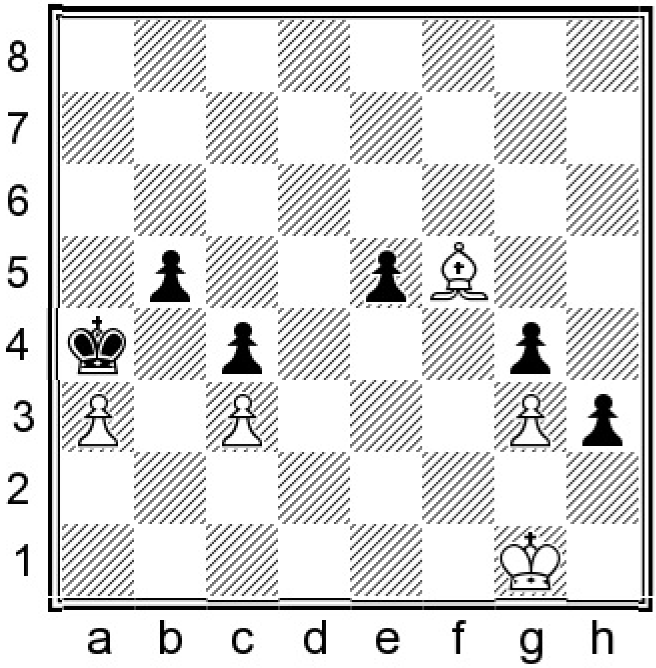
Answer:

69...♗xe4!

Now Black plays this; on the previous move, 68...♗xe4! was also winning, but now the pawn race is much simpler, since with the white king on g1 a black pawn will queen with check.

70.♗xe4 ♔a4 71.♗f5

If 71.♗c6 the quickest way is 71...♔b3 72.♗xb5 ♔xc3 73.♗d7 e4 74.♗xg4 ♔d2 and one of the pawns queens much before White can gain any counterplay.



From what we have already seen we can sense that there are two winning moves, but we know that shortening the path to victory can save us from headaches and regrets.

Exercise: What is the strongest move now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

71...♔b3!

More precise than 71...♔xa3 72.♗xg4 ♔b3, which also wins, but this way Fischer creates another passed pawn more quickly.

72.♗xg4 e4 73.♗xh3

If 73.♗f5 the quickest way is 73...h2+ 74.♔xh2 e3 75.♗g4 ♔xc3, rapidly queening the c-pawn.

73...♔xc3 74.g4 ♔d2

And thanks to the white king being on g1, the c-pawn queens with check after 75.g5 c3 76.g6 c2 77.g7.

0–1

Show in Text Mode

1967

Game 33

Back to Europe

Between March and April 1967 Fischer made a victorious reappearance in Europe after an absence of five years. He was the winner of the strong Monte Carlo tournament, with 7 points out of 9, ahead of Smyslov, Geller, Larsen, etc.

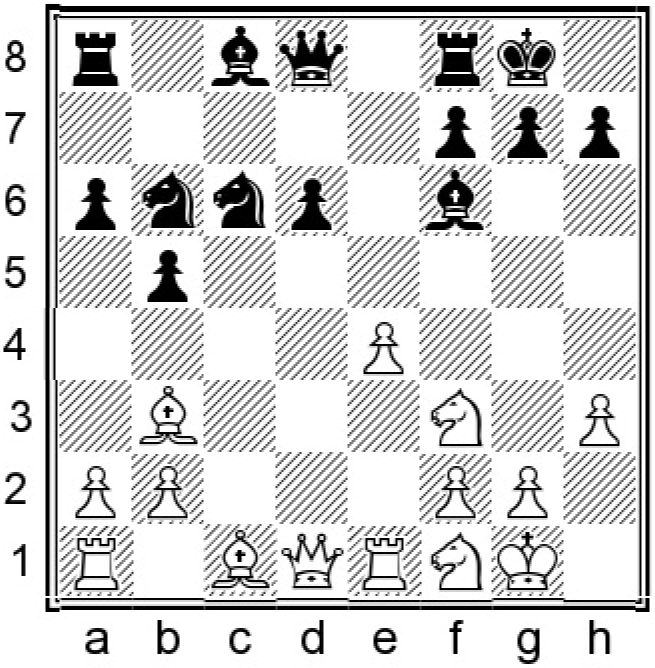
During the tournament Prince Rainier asked him why he was so strong, and Fischer replied that he had read about a thousand chess books and had taken the best from each of them.

For that year's tournament the organisers invited two masters from the USA, on condition that one of them was Fischer; but the demands made by Fischer during the tournament were so exasperating to them that in the invitation to the Monaco tournament the following year, the request was that *neither* of the two masters should be Fischer!

In the game we shall look at now there is another example of Fischer's surprising use of piece exchanges in order to make progress.

Robert Fischer
Gyozo Forintos
Ruy Lopez C92]
Monte Carlo (2), 25.03.1967

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♘b8 10.d4 ♘bd7 11.♘h4 exd4 12.cxd4 ♘b6 13.♘d2 ♘fd5 14.♘hf3 ♘b4 15.d5 c5 16.dxc6 ♘xc6 17.♘f1 ♗f6



White to play

We are in a rather untypical Ruy Lopez position, with the centre already open and with the king’s knight on b6 instead of f6, where instead the bishop puts pressure on b2.

A tactical detail is that the knight on c6 is loose.

Exercise: What did Fischer play here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18.♗e3!

Precisely due to the situation of the knight on c6 Fischer doesn’t need to spend time on defending the b-pawn with18.♕e2 or 18.♖b1 in order to develop his bishop.

18...♘a5

The key is that in the event of 18...♗xb2? White wins material with 19.♕c2!, since after 19...♗xa1 20.♕xc6 Black is left with two pieces en prise; 19...♘c4 is somewhat more complicated but after 20.♗xc4 ♗xa1 White gains a clear advantage, either with 21.♗e2 ♘b4 22.♕d2 ♕f6 23.e5 ♗xe5 24.♘xe5 dxe5 25.♕xb4, or 21.♗b3 ♘e5 22.♖xa1 ♘xf3+ 23.gxf3 ♕f6 24.♕d1 ♗xh3 25.♘g3.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19.♗d4!

Nullifying the pressure on the queenside; it’s worth noting that the black minor pieces are a long way from the kingside and with this move White eliminates the only defender of the black king.

19...♗b7

19...♘xb3 20.♕xb3 ♗b7 21.♖ad1 is unconvincing, as White has more space and is better developed, while Black has a weakness on d6.

It was interesting to keep the bishop on c8 for now and play with his other queenside pieces with 19...♘bc4, leaving the other knight to eliminate the ‘Spanish bishop’ at an opportune moment; then after 20.♕e2 Black can play 20...♘xb3 21.axb3 ♘e5 22.♖ed1 ♕e7, or to see whether it is better wait with 20...♗e6 or 20...♕e7.

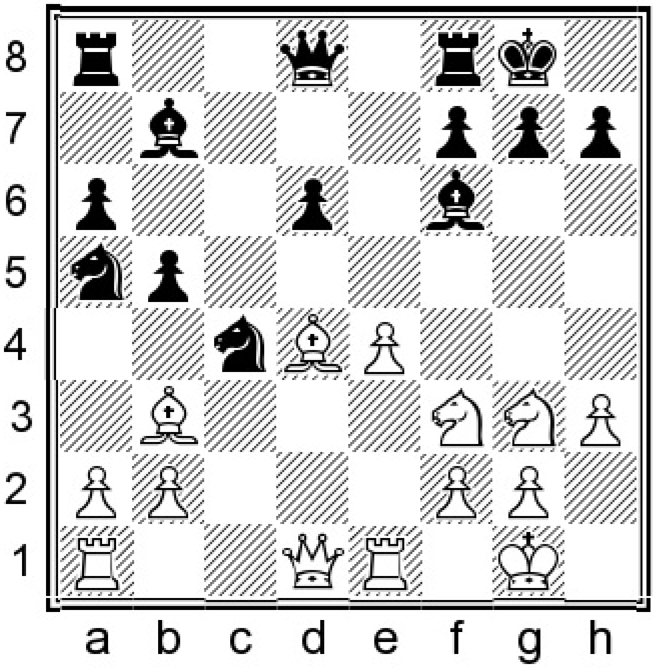
20.♘g3

After his previous bishop move, Black must take into account the leap of White’s g3-knight not only to h5 but also to f5.

20...♘bc4?!

Black apparently underestimates the concentration of white pieces on the kingside. Everything indicates that it was preferable to play the natural 20...g6!, and after e.g. 21.♕d2 ♘d7 22.♖ad1 ♘xb3 23.axb3 ♘e5 Black is fine.

Timman, in *Timman’s Titans*, suggested 20...♘xb3 21.♕xb3 ♗xd4 22.♘xd4 g6, “with chances for equality,” although, as on the previous move, White has a more pleasant game after 23.♖ad1.



21.♗xc4

Question: A surprising exchange; why did Fischer play this?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Perhaps we ought not to be surprised by these ‘Capablanca-like’ exchanges. Fischer considered that his bishop could no longer be useful to him; Black could exchange it when he wanted, so Fischer exchanges it first, preventing the creation of doubled pawns in the future after having to play axb3.

21...♘xc4

Exercise (simple): How did he continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22.♘h5

Of course; this continuation was predictable and in fact was the preference of the engines (in early 2021) on the previous move. It forces Black to take an important decision.

“White introduces an attack on the king that will continue into the endgame.” (Timman).

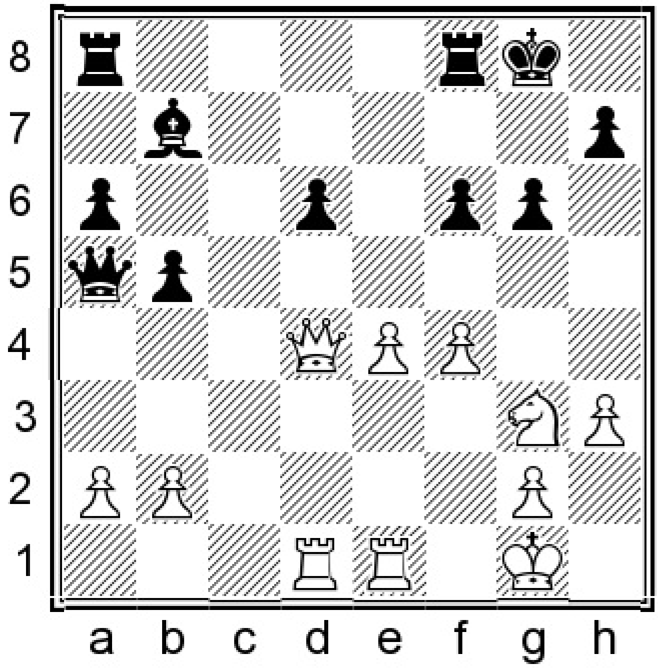
22...♘e5

Black opts to go into an endgame which seemingly was perfectly tenable.

The alternative was 22...♗xd4 23.♕xd4 f6, which after 24.♖ad1 leads to the loss of the d6-pawn for unclear compensation.

23.♘xe5 dxe5

Black continues with his idea, which was criticised by some commentators, who suggested the alternative 23...♗xe5, and after 24.f4 ♗xd4+ 25.♕xd4 f6 26.♖ad1 g6 27.♘g3 ♕a5.



Exercise: What would you play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: After 28.a3 ♖ad8 the suggestion would be fully justified, but White can try to exploit Black’s kingside weaknesses with 28.f5!, and if 28...g5 then 29.♘h5, while after 28...♕xa2 29.fxg6 hxg6 30.e5! dxe5 (30...fxe5? 31.♕xd6 is worse) 31.♕g4, White gains a very strong attack which is worth more than two pawns, e.g. 31...♔h7 32.♖d7+ ♖f7 33.♖f1!, and the White’s offensive is overwhelming, e.g. 33...f5 34.♕h4+ ♔g8 35.♘xf5! ♖xd7 36.♘h6+ ♔g7 37.♘g4, and Black must give up his queen, because 37...♖f7 fails to 38.♕h6+ ♔g8 39.♕xg6+ ♖g7 40.♘f6+ ♔f8 41.♘d5+ ♔g8 42.♘e7+ ♔h8 43.♕h6+ ♖h7 44.♘g6+ and mate.

24.♗c5 ♕xd1

Black continues with his plan, based on the drawing tendency of the bishops of opposite colour.

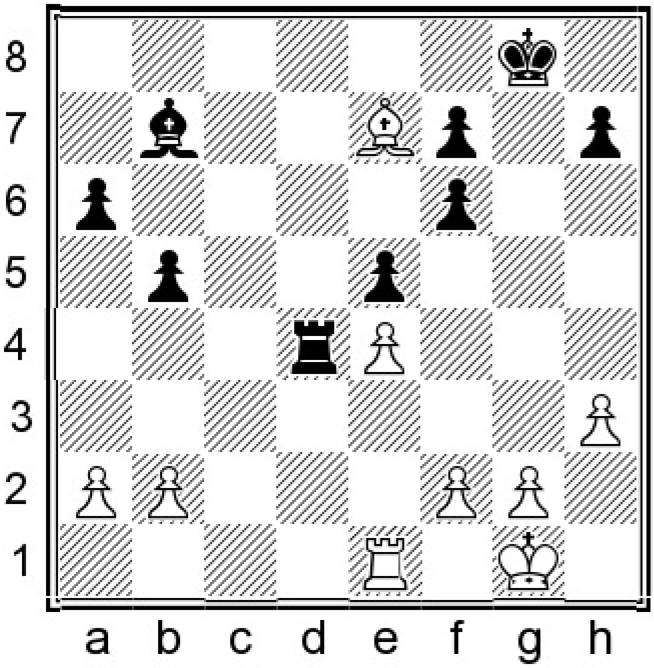
There was no way back now, as the middlegame after 24...♖e8 25.♕g4, followed by ♖ad1, is not at all pleasant.

25.♖axd1 ♖fd8 26.♘xf6+ gxf6 27.♖xd8+ ♖xd8 28.♗e7

For his part, Fischer, having nothing clearly better, also accepts the semi-forced course of the struggle, but, with an idea in mind.

28...♖d4

If 28...♖d2 the continuation of the game would have been the same.



We have an ending which was untypical for Fischer: one rook each and bishops of opposite colour. More usual in his praxis were endings with rook and bishop v. rook and knight or rooks and same-coloured bishops.

Exercise: Apparently Black has managed to equalise, but Fischer saw one move further. What had Fischer calculated?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29.♖e3!

Despite the little material remaining, precisely thanks to the bishops of opposite colour, White creates threats of mate which will lead to a material advantage by keeping the rooks.

Of course not 29.f3? ♔g7 eliminating all winning chances.

Going back, let’s explore the line 28...♖d2 further; as we indicated, 29.♖e3! would have followed, threatening 31.♖g3+ and ♗xf6++, e.g., 29...h5 30.♗xf6 ♖xb2 31.♖g3+ ♔h7 (or 31...♔f8 32.♖g5!) 32.f3! ♖xa2 33.♖g7+ (or immediately 33.♗xe5) 33...♔h6 34.♗xe5, and White has a clear advantage, since he will win f7-pawn and White’s three pawns against one on the kingside are stronger than Black’s 2-1 queenside majority, because they will create threats against the black king as they advance.

29...♗xe4 30.♗xf6 ♔f8 31.a3

Before capturing on e5, White makes a useful move; the pawn evades a possible attack. Meanwhile Black has no moves which would change the situation.

31...♗c6 32.♖xe5 ♖d5

Exercise (simple): How do you think White replied?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

33.♖e3!

Of course not 33.♖xd5?, which would lead to a drawn ending. White continues trying to create problems for the black king.

33...♖f5

Black can only wait for the gradual progress of the white forces.

34.♗e5

The bishop deprives the black rook of some mobility. This is a ‘human’ move, whereas the engines prefer the simple 34.♗c3; there is no great difference between the two moves.

34...h5

White now needs to expand on the kingside.

Exercise: How did Fischer begin his plan?

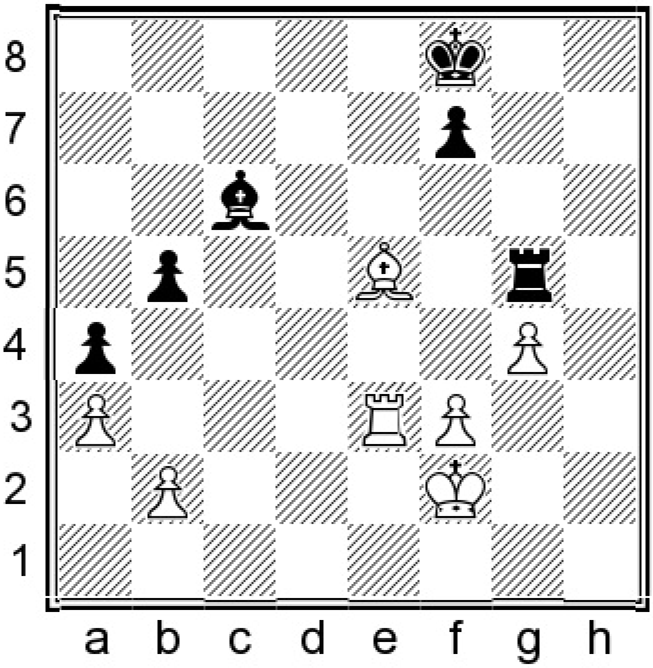
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

35.f3!

Preparing to advance with g4 at an opportune moment. This is the ideal arrangement of the pawns, to dominate the light squares.

35...a5 36.♔f2 a4 37.g4 hxg4 38.hxg4 ♖g5



White is taking small but constant steps forward.

Exercise: What did Fischer play here now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

39.♗f6!

The bishop embeds itself in Black’s position, both to eject the rook and prepare the invasion by his monarch.

39...♖d5

39...♖c5? loses to 40.♗e7+, while 39...♖g6? fails to 40.g5, when Black's rook will remain imprisoned.

40.f4

Now the plan is to advance this pawn to f5, controlling some new light squares. Black can only wait.

40...♖d2+ 41.♔g3 ♖g2+ 42.♔h4 ♖d2 43.f5 ♗d5 44.♔g5 ♖d1

White has made as much progress as he can on the kingside with his bishop and king.

Exercise: What's the next step?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

45.♖c3!

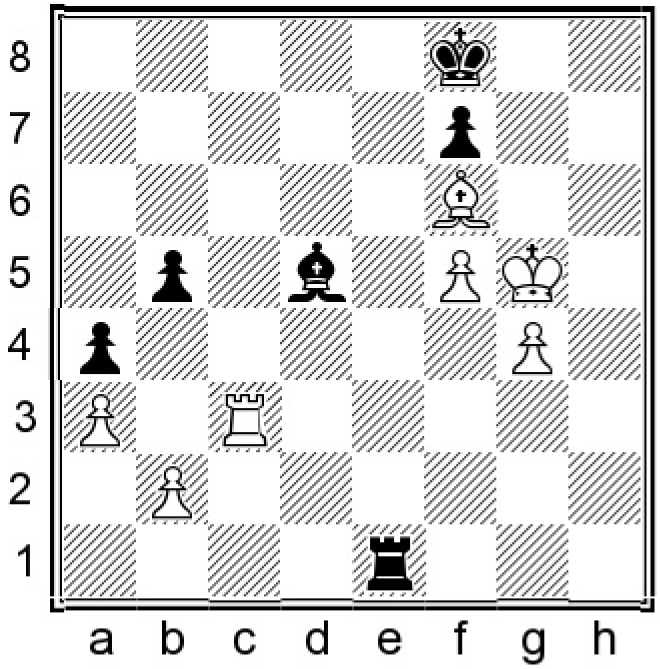
The next step is to resume the attack on the king. This move threatens mate and at the same time it's a very unpleasant intermediate move.

If White had played 45.♖h3 immediately then Black could have answered with 45...♔e8. If Black parries the mate threat with 45...♗c4? White can exploit the fact that the black rook is loose by playing 46.♖h3! ♔e8 47.♖h8+ ♔d7 48.♖d8+, and wins.

45...♖e1?!

The rook is ready to block the check, but White is able to breach this defence.

Karsten Müller suggested a more tenacious defensive try, namely giving up a second pawn with 45...♔e8 46.♖c5 ♔d7 47.♖xb5 ♗b3; this was indeed more resilient but of course it would have merely prolonged the agony.



Exercise: How did Fischer gain a decisive advantage now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

46.♖h3!

Black's idea could be seen in the line 46.♖d3 ♗c4 47.♖d8+ ♖e8, but this intermediate move disrupts the defence.

46...♔e8

46...♖h1 was more resilient but would not have saved Black; the continuation might have been 47.♖d3 ♗c6 48.♖d8+ ♗e8 49.♖b8!, anticipating a future attack on the rook with ...♔e7, and Black is paralysed, e.g. if 49...♖e1 then 50.♗c3 ♖e2 51.♔f6, while if 49...♖c1 then 50.♗c3 ♔e7 51.♗b4+ ♔d7 52.♔f6 (or 52.♖xb5), and in both cases Black is lost.

Exercise: How did Fischer bring about resignation?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

47.♖d3!

Winning the bishop, which is unable to retreat, because now with the king on e8 Black is unable to block the check, and so ♖d8 will be mate.

1–0

Game 34

Back to Yugoslavia

In August 1967 Fischer was the winner of a less strong tournament in Skopje, Yugoslavia, where he defeated Geller, Matulovic, Kholmov, etc., incidentally getting his revenge on the latter for his defeat in the 1965 Capablanca Memorial.

In the game that we shall look at now Fischer once more employed his favourite Sozin Attack; Black played ambitiously, but also riskily, and the game concluded with a model attack on the king in the centre.

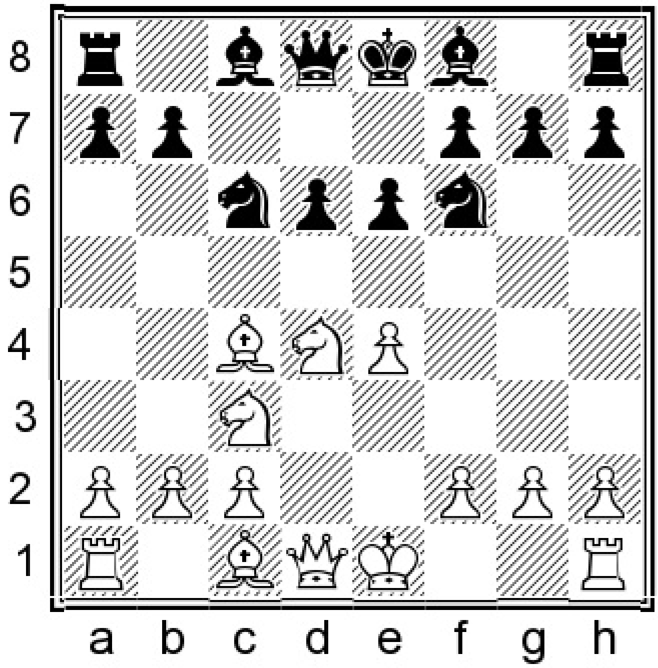
Robert Fischer
Peter Dely
Sicilian Defence [B88]
Skopje (4), 08.1967

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♗c4

Efim Geller commented: “It is possible that the Attack Rauzer - 6.♗g5 – is more dangerous for Black, but the Sozin Attack, which commences with this move, is Fischer’s childhood love.”

Kasparov wrote that in the Sozin Fischer played plans associated with both kingside and queenside and that “In these battles the basis of the modern theory of the variation was laid.”

6...e6



7.♗b3

This was the move that Fischer came to prefer, because according to him it “cuts down Black’s options”; the idea principal is castle kingside and follow up with f4-f5.

Nevertheless, as Kasparov pointed out, he also played 7.♗e3 a few times, with Velimirovic’s idea of 8.♕e2, with plan of castling queenside. In fact in both the second round and the final round of this tournament, against Geller and Sofrevski respectively, Fischer played 7.♗e3, as we shall see in the following game.

7...a6 8.f4 ♕a5?!

Against Short, in 1993 and 1996, Kasparov preferred 8...♗e7 9.♗e3 0-0, continuing with his development.

With the move played, Black is seeking to create tactical problems by trying to exploit the g1-a7 diagonal opened after 8.f4; at the same time Black brings f5 under control and also threatens 9...♘xe4, but it’s not all positive, Black is also delaying his development.

Question: How can we know whether the delay in development is more important than the tactical possibilities?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: There is no universal recipe; you have to rely on your accumulated knowledge, intuition and calculation; each case must be treated individually.

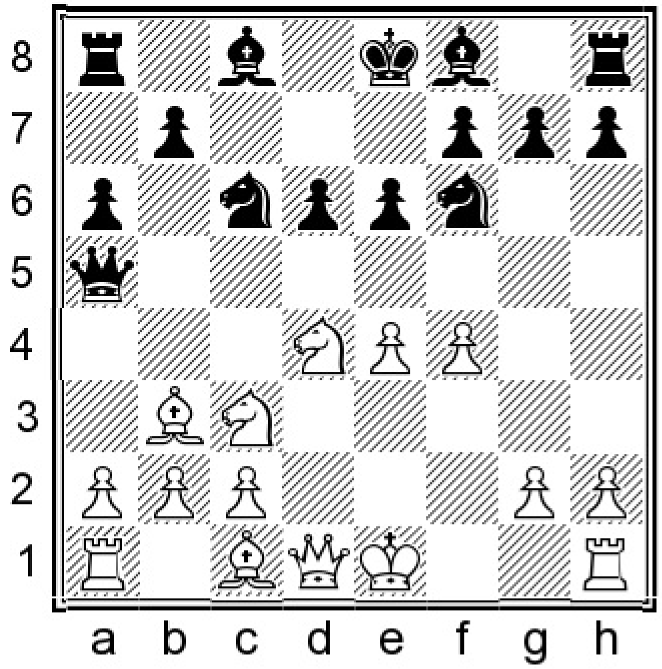
Nevertheless, in the majority of Sicilian positions, delaying development with the black pieces adds to the degree of risk.

If 8...♕c7, with a similar idea to the text, Fischer indicated that White would continue with 9.f5! (9.♗e3 is the main option) which after 9...♘xd4 10.♕xd4 exf5 11.exf5 ♗xf5 12.0-0 "yields a strong attack."

The engines of early 2021 prefer 11.♗g5 and 12.♗g5, with the idea of castling queenside, with good compensation for the pawn.

Fischer also faced 8...♘a5 in Fischer - Bielicki, Mar del Plata 1960; despite his favourite bishop being neutralised, he applied the same recipe: 9.f5! (9.e5! is a strong alternative) 9...♘xb3 10.axb3 ♗e7 11.♕f3 0-0 12.♗e3 ♗d7 13.g4 e5 14.♘de2 "with a crush in sight." (Fischer).

Let's get back to the game.



Exercise: How did Fischer reply to 8...♕a5?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

9.0-0!

Continuing development and not fearing the consequences of the weakness created along the diagonal g1-a7.

9...♘xd4?

It was Fischer who placed a question mark after this move, which is consistent with Black's idea but will be unsuccessful in this case.

Fischer considered that it was preferable to play 9...d5, with the obvious threat of 10...♘xd4 11.♕xd4 ♗c5, but after 10.♘xc6! bxc6 11.f5! "White's on top" and he indicated that it would be bad for Black to open the diagonal of the b3-bishop with 11...d4 12.♘e2 e5, as both 13.♘g3 and 13.♕d3 give White the advantage. According to Fischer, 11...♗e7 12.e5 ♘d7 13.fxe6 fxe6 (or 13...♘xe5 14.♗f4!) 14.♕g4 was also inadequate.

Fischer thought that only 11...♗c5+ 12.♔h1 0-0 "can be tenable," although the engines don't like the black position after 13.e5 ♘d7 14.f6 ♘xe5 15.fxg7, followed by 16.♕h5, with a strong attack.

10.♕xd4 d5

After 10...♕c5 11.♕xc5 dxc5 12.a4! "puts Black in an excruciating bind," according to Fischer; following the imminent advance e5, and after completing development, White will have more space and greater mobility and the f5-advance will always be in the air.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

11.♗e3!

This parries Black's threat in the simplest and most effective way, by continuing with development.

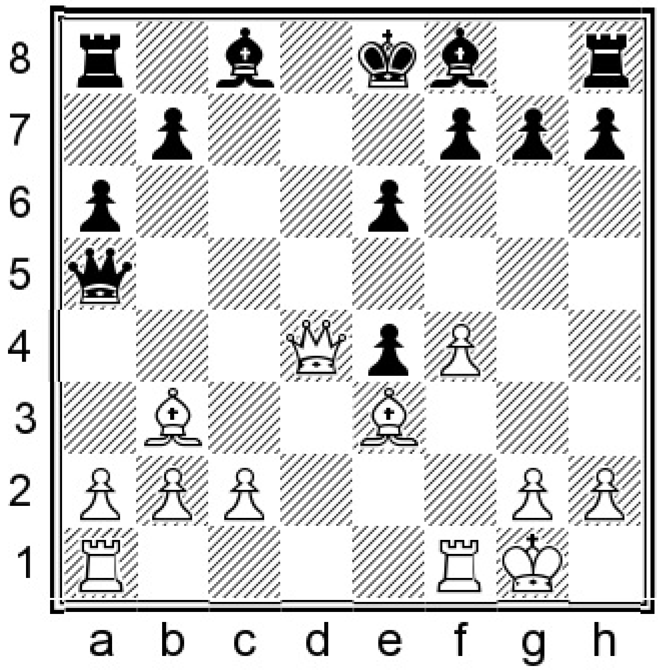
11...♘xe4?

In the event of 11...♘g4, renewing the threat, Fischer gave 12.♔h1!, e.g. 12...♘xe3 13.♕xe3 dxe4 14.♕xe4! ♗e7 and now the immediate 15.f5 is strong, sacrificing a pawn, but Fischer indicated the similarly strong 15.♖ae1, bringing his inactive piece into play, and "mate is lurking in the wings, e.g. 15...g6 16.♘d5! ♗d8 17.♕e5 0-0 18.♘e7+! Wins."

Instead of 14...♗e7, 14...♕b4 loses to 15.♗a4+!, highlighting the power of White's centralised queen; then after 15...♗d7 16.♗xd7+ ♔xd7 17.♖ad1+ ♔e8 (or 17...♔c7 18.♖d4, followed by ♖fd1) 18.♕f3, with the advance f5 in the air and the black king unable to castle.

"Slightly more accurate, but still bad is 11...dxe4 12.♘xe4 ♗e7 13.♘d6+;" (Fischer) White is also better after 12...♘xe4 13.♕xe4 ♗e7 14.♗a4+, or 13...♕c7 14.f5.

12.♘xe4 dxe4



Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13.f5!

The strongest move, opening lines; this is even better than 13.♗a4+ b5 14.♕xe4.

13...♕b4

If 13...exf5 White can play 14.♗a4+! b5 (or 14...♔e7 15.♗d2!) 15.♕e5+! ♗e7 16.♗b3, and the black king is defenceless.

Fischer indicated 14.g4!, opening more lines, and Black is also in serious difficulties, e.g., if 14...♕b4 then 15.♗a4+ b5 16.♕d5!, and wins.

In the event of 14...♗e6 Fischer gave 15.gxf5 ♗xb3 (or 15...♗xf5 16.♗a4+) 16.axb3.

Now on 16...♕c7 there are several strong moves; instead of capturing on e4 it seems best to play 17.♖fd1!, preventing the development of the bishop on f8; after 17...♖d8 18.♕xe4+ ♗e7 19.♖xd8+ ♕xd8 20.f6! gxf6 21.♕xb7, the black king is faced with a very difficult defensive task.

Fischer's line continued 16...♕b4 17.♖a4! ♕xd4 18.♖xd4, "and Black is in a curiously hopeless predicament: e.g., 18...♗e7 19.♖xe4 ♔f8 20.f6!! ♗xf6 21.♖xf6! gxf6 22.♗h6+ and mates."

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer respond?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

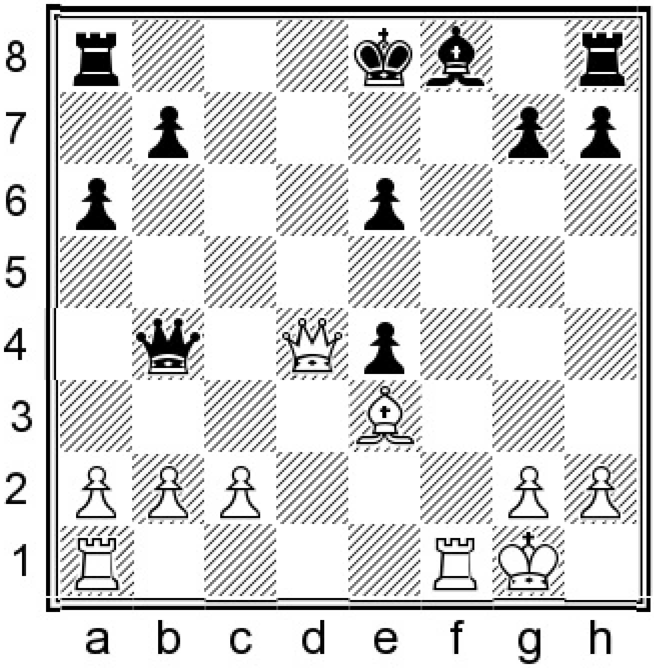
14.fxe6!

Of course, opening the game further as well as preventing the exchange of queens, since if 14...♕xd4 then White plays the intermediate move 15.exf7+.

14...♗xe6

If 14...fxe6 then 15.♕e5 and then if 15...♕b5 the strongest move is 16.♕f4, with the idea of invading on f7.

15.♗xe6 fxe6



Exercise: How did Fischer now strike a decisive blow?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16.♖xf8+!

The first step; with this exchange sacrifice the black queen is forced to retreat to f8 and further restrict the black king.

16...♕xf8

Exercise: How did Fischer now induce his opponent to resign?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17.♕a4+!

“On 17...b5 18.♕xe4 ♖d8 19.♕c6+! ♖d7 20.♖d1 ♕e7 and now 21.♗b6! (Dely),” commented Fischer, there is no good defence against 22.♕c8+.

Exercise: “About the only move that doesn’t win is 21.♗g5,” wrote Fischer; why is that?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

Because Black can play 21...0-0! and can fight on, since he will only be one pawn down.

1–0

Game 35

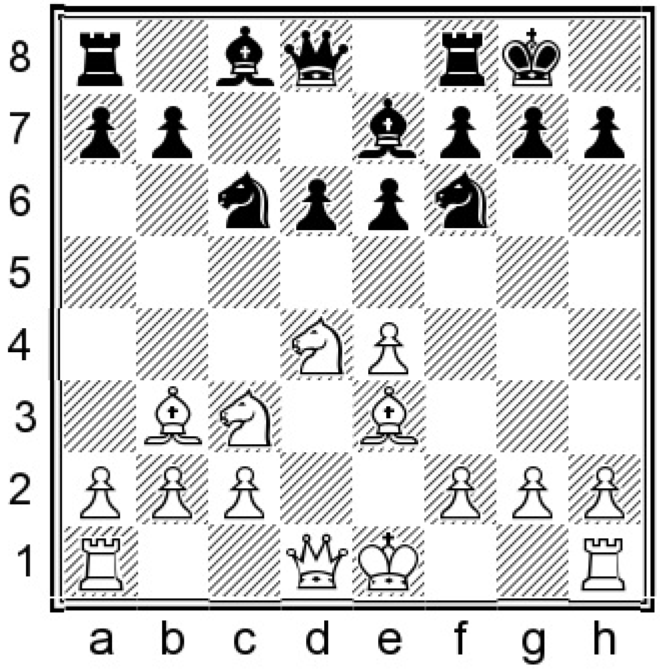
A terrific finish

In the final round of the Skopje Tournament. Fischer once again demonstrated his excellent handling of the Sozin Attack; he had earlier suffered a loss against Geller in the same line, but only after squandering a winning position.

In the following game one mistake by Black made possible a tactical blow which led to a surprisingly speedy defeat.

Robert Fischer
Jovan Sofrevski
Sicilian Defence [B89]
Skopje (17), 30.08.1967

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♗c4 e6 7.♗b3 ♗e7 8.♗e3 0-0



9.♕e2

“Preparing queenside castling and disallowing the reply ...♘g4, which would be the case after 9.♕d2.” (Fischer).

The fourth game of the Fischer - Spassky match in Reykjavík 1972 continued 9.0-0 a6 10.f4 ♘xd4 11.♗xd4 b5 12.a3 (12.e5! is an improvement, played for example in Short - Kasparov, London m/14 1993 and Amsterdam 1996) 12...♗b7 13.♕d3 a5!, with good play; later Fischer experienced some problems but managed to draw.

In subsequent encounters Fischer never returned to the “love of his youth” 6.♗c4.

9...♕a5?!

The main line of the Velimirovic Attack became 9...a6 10.0-0-0 ♕c7 11.g4, or 11.♖hg1.

10.0-0-0

Fischer remains faithful to the initial idea of this line, although he indicated that 10.0-0 “also comes into consideration.”

10...♘xd4

Question: Why exchange on d4, leaving a centralised white piece? Isn’t it better to continue with development?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Here's Geller reply: "Of course, Black would have liked to play 10...♗d7?! immediately, without revealing his cards, but then White can gain the advantage by 11.♘db5! ♘e8 12.♗f4 a6 13.♘xd6 ♘xd6 14.♗xd6 ♗xd6 15.♖xd6 ♕g5+ 16.♕d2 ♕xg2 17.♖d1 ♗e8 18.♕f4; this variation is also cited by Fischer."

11.♗xd4

Geller mentioned the alternative 11.♖xd4 with the idea of 11...♗d7 12.g4, but it's not clear that this is better; after 12...e5 Kasparov suggested 13.♖d2 with the continuation 13...♗xg4 14.f3 ♗e6 15.♔b1, "with an initiative for the pawn."

Another retreat for the rook, endorsed by the engines of early 2021, is 13.♖d3, which maintains the possibility of playing along the third rank; after 13...♗xg4 White plays 14.♕f1, with the idea of 15.♖g1, and discouraging 14...♗e6 due to 15.♗xe6 fxe6 16.♕h3.

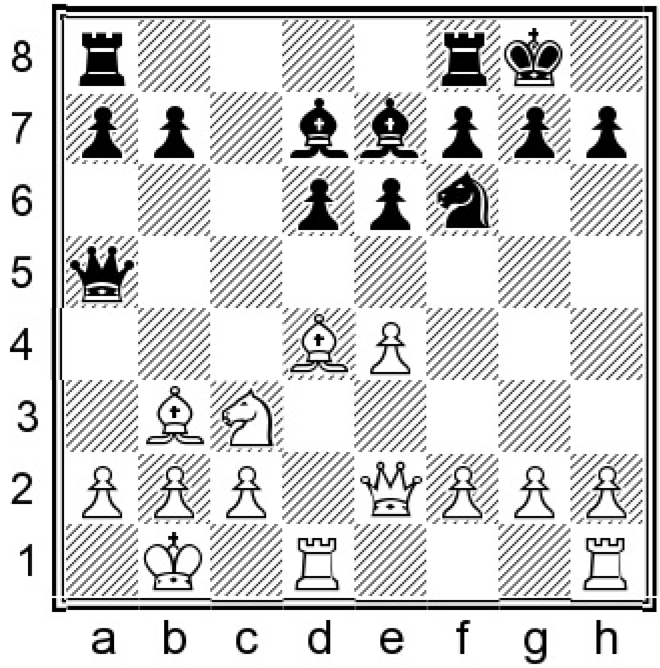
After 11.♖xd4 ♗d7 12.g4, instead of 12...e5 the typical response 12...♗c6 is possible; the bishop makes way for the knight and after 13.g5 ♘d7, with the idea of 14...b5, the struggle is just beginning, with chances for both sides.

11...♗d7

"It stands to reason that at the board I did not even consider variations resulting from 11...♕g5+? and ...♕xg2. As it is, the game is about to become open, and Black's chances lie in a counterattack on the queenside. For this ...b5 must be prepared as soon as possible, which is what the move played is aimed at." (Geller).

Fischer analyses this line with the queen capturing on g2 in his book, but starts off by saying that Black "cannot afford to go pawn-snatching."

12.♔b1



“A critical position. White’s immediate threat is 13.♗xf6.” (Fischer).

12...♖ad8?!

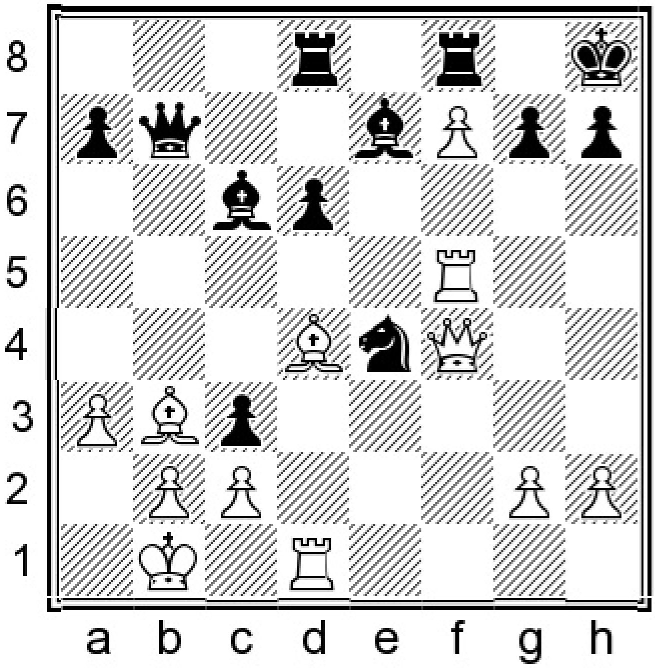
Geller commented that Black must choose between 12...♖fd8, 12...♖fc8 and the move played in the game.

Kasparov agreed with Geller’s conclusion that the best move for Black was 12...♖fc8!, with the idea of ...b5.

In Fischer - Geller, Skopje 1967, Geller chose 12...♗c6?, which he himself admitted “frees White’s hands. The bishop stood very well at d7, hindering the advance of White’s kingside pawns (f4 or g4), which would have been countered with ...e5.”

Let’s take a look at just a few critical moments of this game, in which Fischer obtained a winning position, and which he annotated in detail in his book *My 60 Memorable Games* (you are strongly advised to look at it there).

The game went 13.f4 ♖ad8 14.♖hf1 (“I already had in mind the ensuing sacrifice,” wrote Fischer) 14...b5 15.f5!! b4 16.fxe6! bxc3 17.exf7+ ♔h8 18.♖f5! ♕b4 19.♕f1! (“A hard move to find – it took around 45 minutes. The threat of ♖xf6 must be attended to.”) 19...♘xe4 20.a3? (A move that weakens the castled position, something that seems unimportant at this stage; two hours after the game Fischer discovered the winning move, 20.♕f4!, a move which the current engines find immediately) 20...♕b7 21.♕f4.

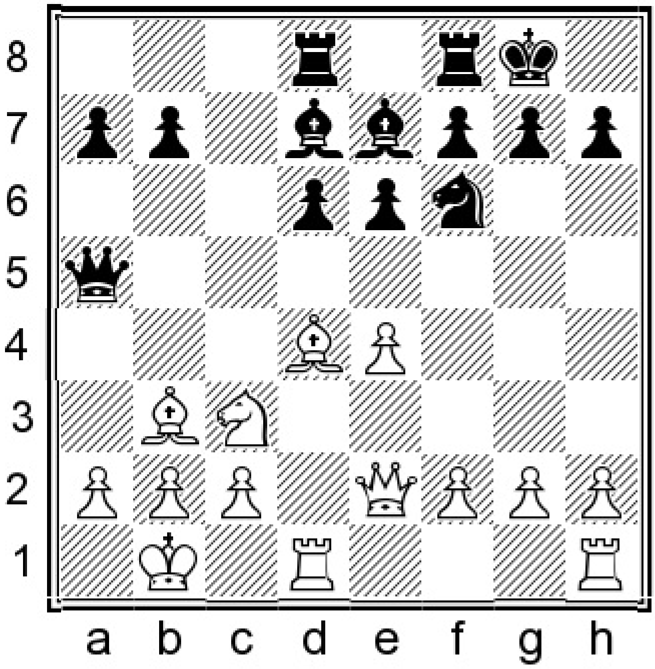


Exercise: What was the crushing move for Black that Fischer had underestimated?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: 21...♗a4!! (and unexpectedly the black attack is quicker) 22.♕g4 ♗f6! 23.♖xf6 ♗xb3! ("At long last I saw the point of Geller's clever defence. As I was studying 24.♖f4 [if 24.cxb3 then 24...♘xf6], it suddenly dawned on me that 24...♗a2+! was curtains. So... 0–1."

Let's get back to our game.



Exercise: How did Fischer reply to 12...♖ad8?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13.♕e3!

White threatens to capture on a7. Fischer gave this move an exclamation mark, which perhaps it doesn’t really deserve, although in practice it proved devastating.

It was very attractive to continue with the attack by playing 13.g4!; then in the event of 13...e5 White can respond by sacrificing the g-pawn, in similar fashion to what we have already seen, e.g. 14.♗e3 ♗xg4 15.f3 ♗e6 16.♖hg1 or 16.♕g2, and the half-open g-file gives White compensation for the pawn.

Even better is 14.g5!, since after e.g. 14...exd4 15.gxf6 ♗xf6 16.♘d5 ♗e6 17.♘xf6+ gxf6 18.♖xd4 White has the better structure and Black has weak pawns and a weak king, with material equality.

13...b6?

Fischer considered that the dangerous pawn sacrifice 13...b5 should be carefully examined; he gave “14.a3! (not 14.♗xa7 ♖a8 with active play) 14...b4 15.axb4 ♕xb4 16.♗xa7 ♕b7 17.♕b6! ♕a8 18.f3 and Black no has way to prosecute his attack.”

Nevertheless, the current engines are much more optimistic than Fischer with Black’s chances after 18...♖c8!, with the idea of ...♖c6 or ...♖c5, and preparing to deploy the major pieces on the a- or c-file.

Therefore, 13...b5! raises serious doubts about the exclamation mark awarded to 13.♕e3!.

Geller suggested 13...♗c6 and he considered 14.♗xa7?! to be dubious due to 14...♘d7 “when it is not clear how the bishop at a7 can be freed.”

Exercise: Can you show how in this case White can still advantageously liberate his bishop?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: White can play 15.♗d4!, since 15...e5?! is not to be feared due to 16.♘d5! ♗xd5 and now the intermediate move 17.♗c3! leaves White with an extra pawn and the better position.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply to 13...b6?

Show/Hide Solution

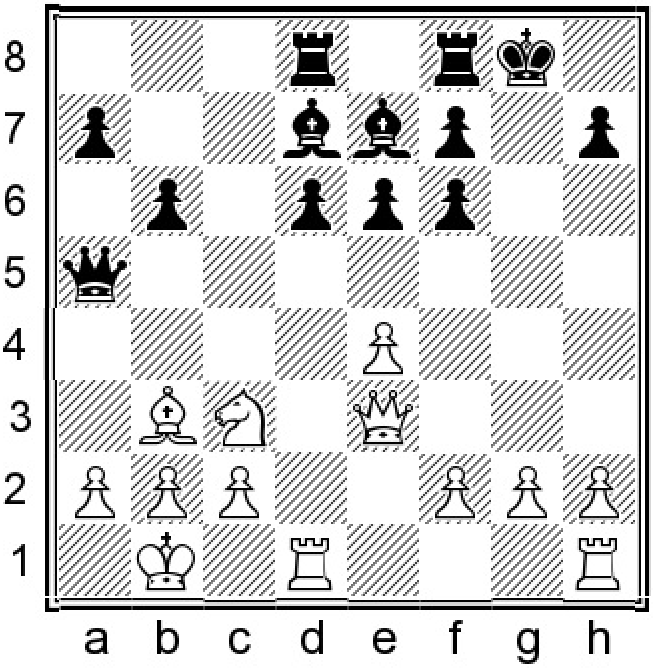
Answer:

14.♗xf6!

And Black must now choose between two evils.

14...gxf6?

“Black should reconcile himself to the loss of a pawn after 14...♗xf6 15.♖xd6 ♗c8.” (Fischer).



Although Black’s structure is weak, he could regroup by playing ...♔h8, ...♖g8, etc.; it doesn’t appear simple to breach the black defences, but this isn’t the case.

Exercise: How did Fischer punish Black for having recaptured on f6 with the pawn?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

15.♘d5!!

The bad situation of the queen on a5 proves decisive, as it allows White to gain a decisive tempo after 15...exd5 16.♖xd5 ♕a6 17.♖h5, with the plan of ♕h6; if 17...♗g4 then 18.♕g3 wins.

15...♖fe8 16.♘xe7+

Fischer commented that 16.♕h6! was a "quicker kill," but there is no great difference; White captures a pawn and the pin on the d-file, plus the weakness of Black's castled position, allows no further resistance.

16...♖xe7 17.♖xd6 ♖c8 18.♕d4 ♗e8 19.♕xf6

1–0

Game 36

First "flight" from the world title match

Fischer arrived very well prepared for the Sousse Interzonal in Tunisia, which began in October 1967. Kasparov describes the events of that tournament as "harakiri" on Fischer's part and its denouement is an enigma.

After playing ten rounds, Fischer withdrew, having scored 8½ points, defeating among others the three-times Soviet Champion Leonid Stein.

Fischer would very likely have come first, and even if he only finished in the first six he would have qualified for the candidates matches, from which he would emerge as the challenger to the World Champion Tigran Petrosian.

Fischer did some strange things during the tournament. For example, he suggested to Korchnoi that they should play at seven in the evening instead of at the officially established time, four o'clock; when Korchnoi asked him why, Fischer gave him no reason.

He also had his table changed frequently, even during the game itself, claiming his table was poorly lit, or because the spectators were too close, or the noise was annoying him. These last two reasons are more understandable.

The argument that other players did not complain about the lighting is not significant; Fischer was the first to demand minimum playing conditions, both at the board and away from it, and time has proved him right.

In the third game from the Interzonal we shall see a model handling of the King's Indian Attack; studying this game is absolutely essential for any player of the King's Indian and/or the King's Indian Attack.

Robert Fischer
Lhamsuren Myagmarsuren
King's Indian Attack [A08]
Sousse Interzonal (3), 18.10.1967

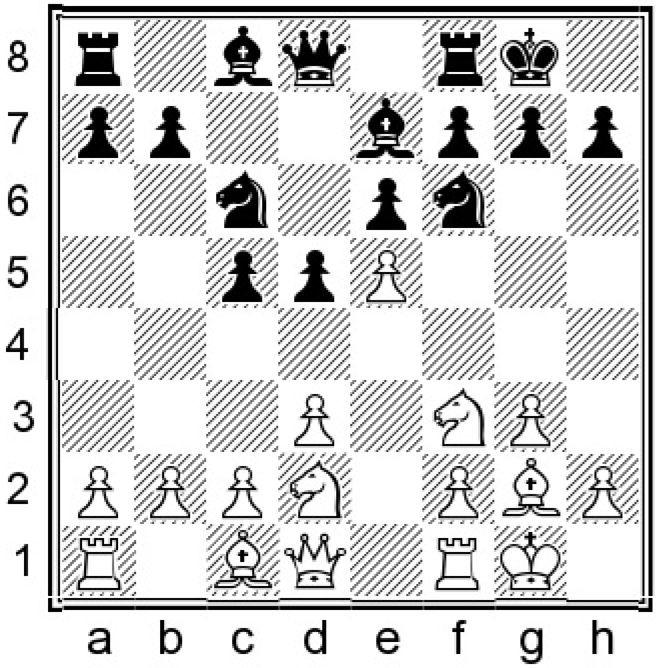
1.e4 e6 2.d3

Question: Once again? Why did Fischer play this seemingly harmless move from time to time?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes, once again, as we mentioned earlier, Fischer wants to reach a type of King's Indian with colours reversed, which he considered favourable to White, thanks to the extra tempo and because the line reached isn't one of the most challenging against the King's Indian.

2...d5 3.♘d2 ♘f6 4.g3 c5 5.♗g2 ♘c6 6.♘gf3 ♗e7 7.0-0 0-0 8.e5



Question: We are in a type of structure which, as we have seen, Fischer played with both colours, always on the "Indian" side. What can you tell me about this position?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Let's hand over to Fischer, from his column in the magazine *Boys Life*. Commenting on 8.e5, he wrote: "The key strategical thrust. My plan is first to drive his defensively well-placed knight to an inferior square, then slowly ring his cramped king's position with my pieces - to mate him. Of course, Black gets counterplay on the opposite wing. The question is: who comes first?".

(From now on, unless otherwise indicated, all the notes between inverted commas are by Fischer in the above-mentioned publication).

8...♘d7 9.♖e1 b5

Black immediately starts his pawn storm on the queenside.

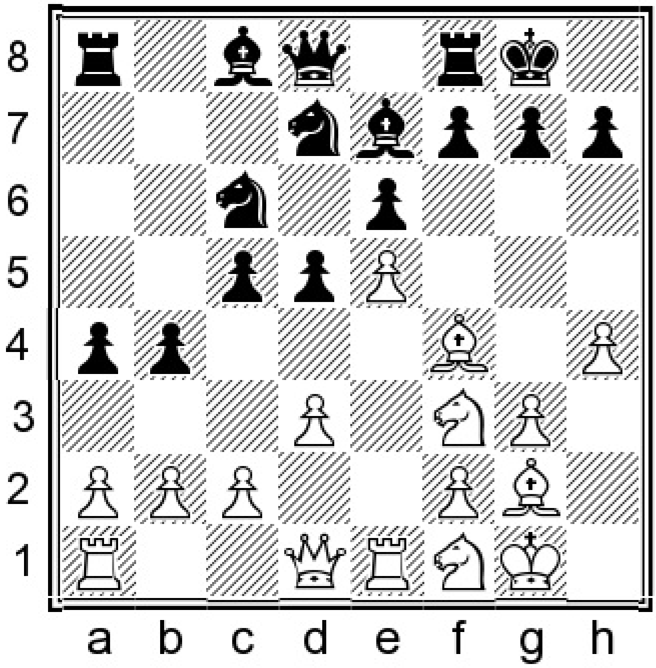
10.♘f1

White’s moves are almost automatic; the knight goes to the kingside, making room for the queen’s bishop to overprotect the pawn on e5.

10...b4

The same can be said for Black’s moves; he continues advancing pawns, trying to open lines favourably and make the queenside, where Black has the advantage, the main battleground.

11.h4 a5 12.♗f4 a4



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13.a3!

“Believe it or not, I actually spent more time on this innocuous push (15 minutes) than any other move in the game! I didn’t want to allow Black to get in ...a3, which would practically force me to reply with b3, thereby creating “holes” (weak squares) on c3 and d4. On the other hand, by stopping to meet his positional threat I am forced to postpone my own schemes for at least one move. Chess is a matter of delicate judgement, knowing when to punch and how to duck.”

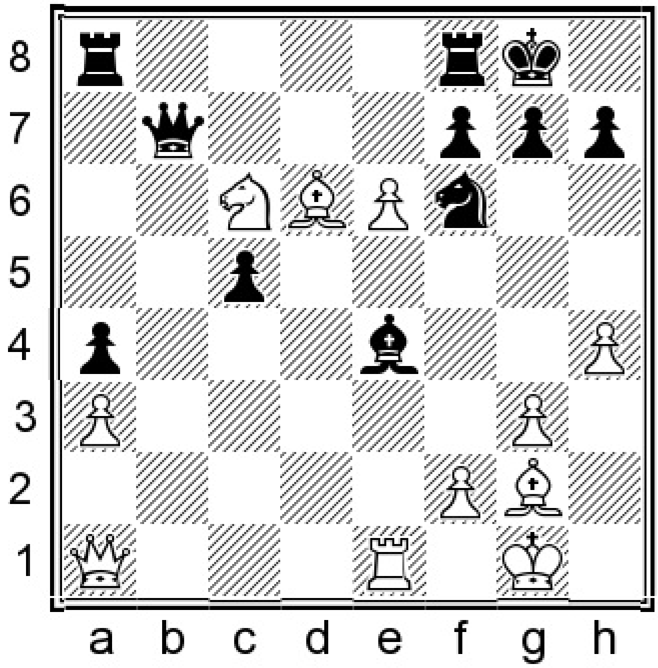
Fischer’s final remark is reminiscent of boxing, don’t you think?

Nevertheless, the time consumed and the doubts expressed by Fischer are rather strange at first sight, because this type of move, 13.a3!, which subsequently became thematic in such positions, had already been employed by Fischer – let’s recall the move 20...a6!, which he played against Bisguier in our Game 25. The position isn’t identical, but has similarities.

13...bxa3 14.bxa3 ♘a5?!

Black wants to prevent c4, but the drawbacks will be greater than the benefits and the knight will be out of play. Instead, 14...♘d4 was recommended, while the most usual move here is 14...♗a6.

Precisely with regard to the advance c4 which Black wanted to prevent, Fischer cited the game between “22-year old super-talent Florin Gheorghiu of Rumania (White) and Wolfgang Uhlmann of East Germany (Black) [which] reached the identical position. After 14...♗a6 the following fantastic continuation occurred: 15.♘e3 ♘d4 16.c4! ♘b3 17.cxd5! ♘xa1 18.♕xa1 exd5 19.♘xd5 ♗xd3 (19...♘b6! was more of a chance.) 20.e6! ♘f6 21.♘e7+ ♕xe7 22.♘e5 ♗g6 23.♘c6! ♕b7 24.♗d6 ♗e4...”



Exercise: What do you think Gheorghiu played here?

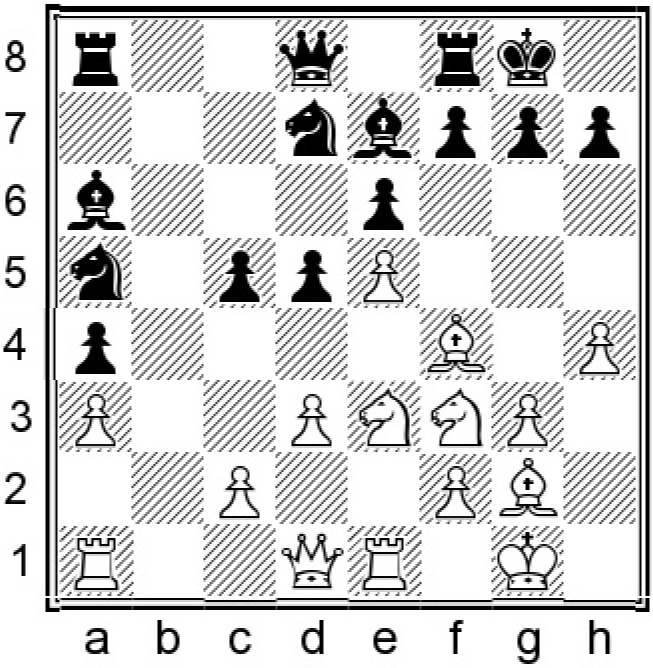
Show/Hide Solution

Answer: “25.♖xe4! ♕xc6 26.♗xf8, and Black resigned. Let’s see why: on 26...♘xe4 27.♕xg7 mate or 26...♔xf8 27.♖e5 wins the exchange. Finally, after 26...♖xf8 27.♕xf6!! gxf6 (or 27...♕xe4!? 28.♕xf7+ and White emerges a full piece ahead) 28.♖g4+ ♔h8 29.♗xc6 and White is a bishop ahead with an easy win in sight."

15.♘e3

One of the thematic ideas is h4–h5–h6, followed by exchanging the dark-squared bishops with ♗g5, but here Fischer is following another common plan which is to play ♘g5 and ♕h5 (although this does not rule out the idea of advancing the h-pawn, if appropriate); the other knight can go to g4, with the aim of invading on f6.

15...♗a6



Exercise: Fischer now made another move which is thematic in this structure; what do you think it was?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16.♗h3!

" This cryptic sortie, by keeping an eye on the e-pawn, restrains Black's normal freeing manoeuvre with ...f6."

It is worth adding that in addition to this defensive function, from h3 the bishop, in combination with a future ♘g5 and ♕h5, could help in the attack, lending support to possible combinations based on ♘xf7 or ♘xe6.

As earlier, 16.h5 with the idea of h6 is an alternative, while the preference of the engines (early 2021) is the immediate 16.♘g5.

16...d4

Exercise (simple): Where did Fischer move his attacked knight?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17.♘f1

Going to g4 was also to be considered, but Fischer prefers something clearer; the knight is heading for e4, the square that Black has just made available.

17...♘b6

“ Black, on the other hand, has secured an outpost for his pieces on d5.”

18.♘g5 ♘d5?!

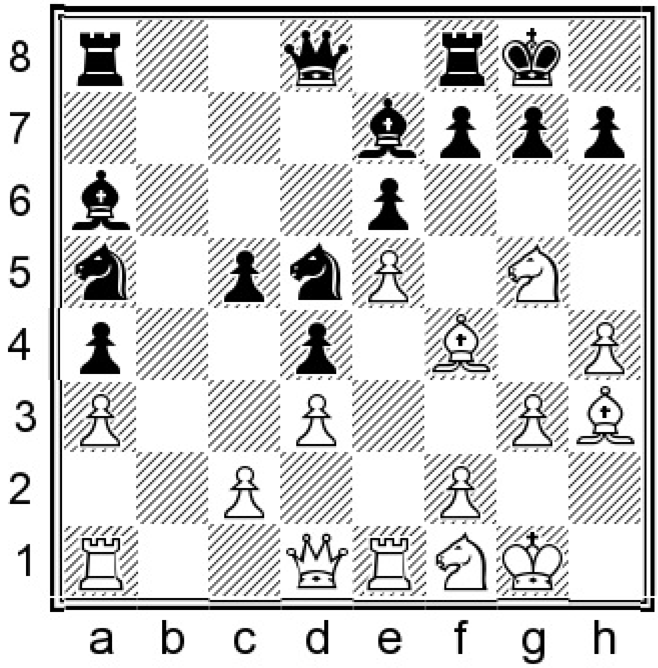
Question: Why is this dubious? This was the idea, wasn’t it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes, but it’s also important to choose the appropriate moment to install the knight on d5.

Fischer commented that it was preferable to “have driven off White’s pieces with 18...h6 19.♘e4 c4 with reasonable counterplay.”

Of course White could have continued with 20.♕g4 or 20.♕h5, and the black position would have been, at least in practice, more difficult to handle.



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19.♗d2!

It’s a matter of knowing “when to punch and how to duck,” remember? It’s worth losing a tempo here to preserve the bishop and avoid structural damage.

19.♕h5 was possible but, as we have already seen, in this game and on other occasions, Fischer tends to prefer a good and healthy continuation to one that is perhaps better, but unnecessarily complicated.

19...♗xg5

Question: But if it was so important to expel the white knight, why not do so now? The retreat of White’s bishop doesn’t seem to have improved his attacking prospects.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Admittedly the black knight is now centralised and the white bishop has indeed retreated, but appearances are often deceptive. It’s essential calculate, and then you see that this is not the case, or not the whole story, and the fact is that on d2 the bishop helps the attack indirectly.

Let’s convert your question into an...

Exercise: Show why it wasn’t appropriate to try to expel the knight from g5 with 19...h6.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: “The point is that 19...h6? now fails owing to 20.♘xe6! fxe6 21.♗xe6+ ♔h8 22.♗xa5 ♕xa5 23.♗xd5, and wins two pawns;” but not 22.♗xd5+? ♕xd5 23.♗xa5, when 23...♗b7! turns the tables.

Fischer also added that instead of exchanging on g5 “...19...c4 was still a better try for Black. He doesn’t get around to this idea until it’s too late.”

20.♗xg5 ♕d7 21.♕h5

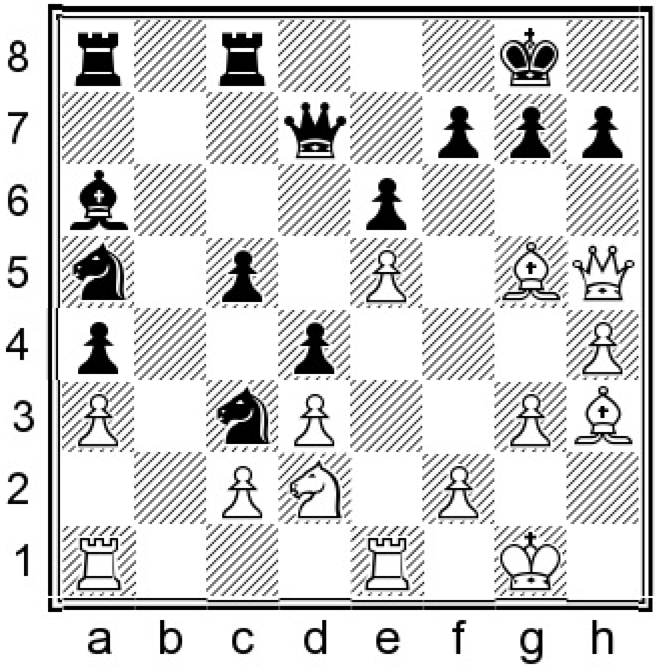
“Make way for the heavy artillery!”.

21...♖fc8 22.♘d2

The threat is 23.♘e4, which provokes Black’s next move.

22...♘c3?!

“22...c4 was still imperative. A sound chess maxim is: “the best defence is attack.”



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23.♗f6!

This threats 24.♕g5 g6 25.♕h6 and mate.

23...♕e8

"Of course the bishop immune from capture. If 23...gxf6 24.exf6 ♔h8 25.♘f3 ♘d5 (if 25...♖g8 26.♘e5 is decisive) 26.♕h6 ♖g8 27.♘e5, and the attack crashes through."

Another way to win was 25.♗f5! exf5 26.♖e7 ♕d5 27.♖xf7, and Back is forced to give up his queen.

With the text move "Black is trying to survive by hanging on to the ropes."

24.♘e4 g6 25.♕g5 ♘xe4 26.♖xe4

Question: Was 24.♘e4 a good move? Black has managed to exchange the knight, which was the best piece for occupying the e4-square.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Fischer gives you the answer: "Each exchange, it is true, benefits the defender because it helps to break the force of the attack. However, White's rook adds more fuel to the fire."

26...c4

Finally! 26...♗b7 isn't an improvement in view of 27.♖g4, or 27.♖f4 followed by h5; Black is unable to create any threats on the long diagonal.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

27.h5!

Everything is ready for opening lines against the black king position. Fischer prefers to sacrifice pawns to speed up the attack, instead of playing 27.dxc4.

It’s worth noting that taking on c4 was also objectively good, but changing plan for a minimal material advantage is not something Fischer tended to do, unless it constitutes a clear improvement.

27...cxd3

Exercise: How did Fischer continue the attack?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

28.♖h4!

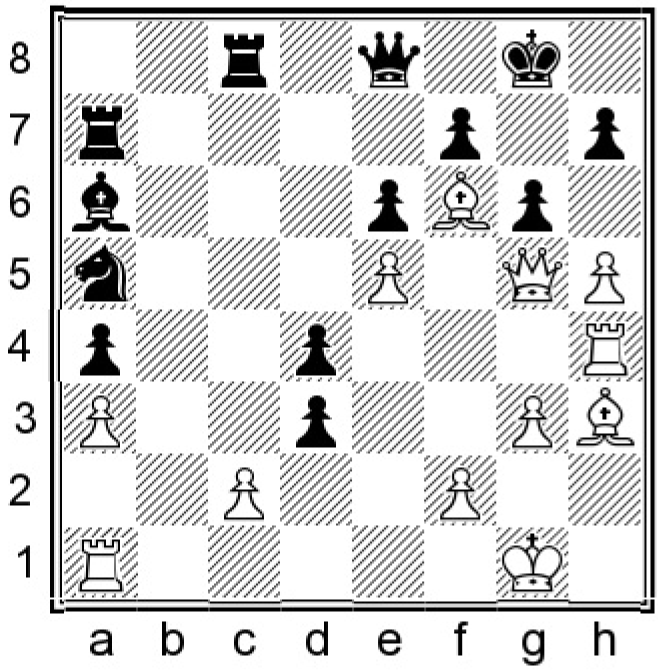
“The onslaught is already so devastating that White can afford to ignore his queenside.”

28...♖a7

“In order to answer hxg6 with fxg6 and the rook guards the seventh rank. But not 28...dxc2 29.hxg6 fxg6 30.♖xh7! c1=♕+ (or 30...♔xh7 31.♕h4+ ♔g8 32.♕h8+ ♔f7 33.♕g7++) 31.♖xc1 ♖xc1+ 32.♕xc1 ♔xh7 33.♕c7+!, and mates shortly.”

28...♖a7 is the most logical defensive move; the rook was doing nothing on a8 and now joins in the defence, but concrete calculation suggests that 28...♖c7 was slightly better, preventing a winning line for White, as we shall see.

“...White could still win, but it would take longer,” according to Fischer. After 28...♖c7 the most practical move would have been 29.cxd3, but the engines find a surprising short cut to victory: 29.♗g4!, with a finish similar to the game, as we shall see.



Exercise: How did Fischer reply here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29.♗g2!

"The bishop enters the attack by repositioning on the e4-square."

Many commentators have highlighted Fischer's extraordinary handling of the light-squared bishop, in all types of positions. The importance of this move will soon be seen.

Nevertheless, the ruthless engines point out that there was a quicker win here with 29.♗g4!!, with a similar idea to Fischer's. This is a move which is difficult to find because it seems so unnatural, but from g4 the bishop fulfils a function similar to the one it will fulfil from e4.

29...dxc2

At this point Fischer sensed that the player with the black pieces thought that he (Fischer) had miscalculated by allowing the creation of this dangerous passed pawn.

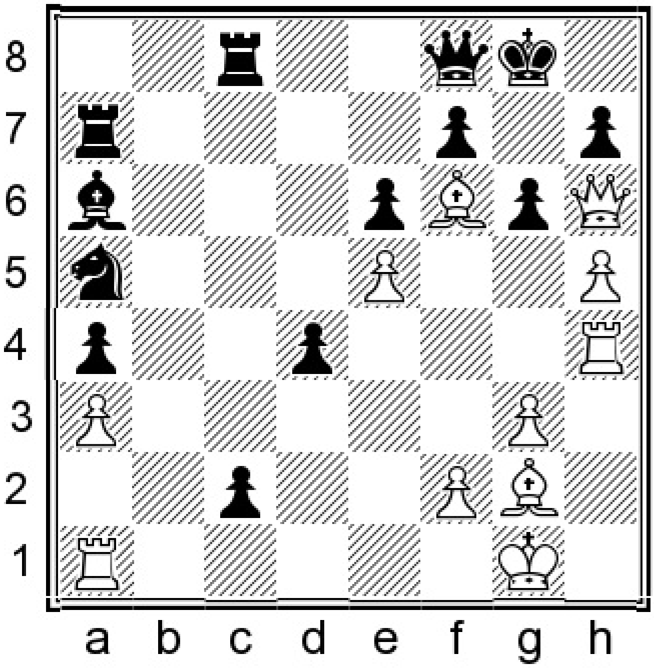
But there was nothing better; 29...♕f8 would have allowed 30.♗e4 dxc2 31.hxg6 fxg6 32.♗xg6!, while if 29...♗b7 then 30.hxg6 fxg6 31.♖xh7! wins, as we have seen.

This was the point in his annotations where Fischer explained why it would have been more tenacious to play 28...♖c7 (instead of 28...♖a7); (29.♗g2) in that case after 29...♗b7 30.hxg6 fxg6 31.♖xh7 doesn't work, because the rook on c7 is preventing it.

As we noted above, after 28...♖c7 the simplest would have been 29.cxd3, followed by doubling the rooks on the h-file, although objectively the engines suggestion of 29.♗g4! is a quicker way to win.

30.♕h6 ♕f8

After 30...c1=♕+ 31.♖xc1 ♖xc1+ 32.♔h2! there follows the same finish as in the game.



Exercise: What was the continuation that Fischer had prepared here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

31.♕xh7+!

“Myagmarsuren got the message. After 31...♔xh7 32.hxg6+ Black can choose his own mate: 32...♔xg6 33.♗e4++ or 32...♔g8 33.♖h8++.”

This is one of the arguments in favour of 29.♗g2 - the ability to give this deadly check on e4.

Let’s also see the reason for 29.♗g4: in the diagram position, let’s place the bishop on g4; (29...dxc2 30.♕h6 ♕f8) then after 31.♕xh7+! ♔xh7 32.hxg6+ ♔xg6 White has 33.♗h5+ ♔h7 (or 33...♔f5 34.♖f4++) 34.♗f3+ ♕h6 35.♗e4+ and mate in a few moves.

1–0

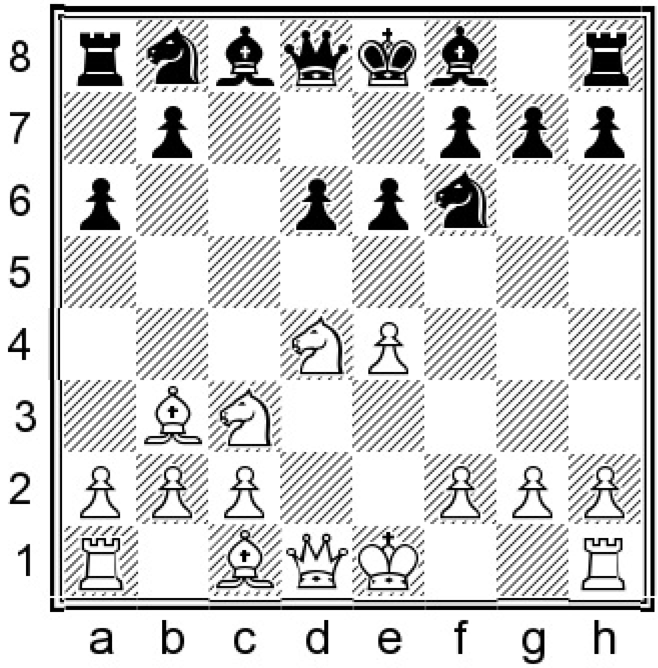
Game 37

Punishing the Sozin Attack

Fischer was the one who gave the greatest boost to the Sozin Attack, with a number of model games, but at the same time, curiously he was also the one who dealt it the worst blows. In this game he refutes White’s setup with a surprising manoeuvre on his own kingside.

Robert Byrne
Robert Fischer
Sicilian Defence [B87]
Sousse Interzonal (12) 31.10.1967

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♗c4 e6 7.♗b3



Robert Byrne made the daring decision to play Fischer’s favourite variation against him.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

7...b5!

“This reaction must be prompt!” (Fischer); on 7...♗e7 White can play 8.g4!, with a good version of the Keres attack, according to Kasparov.

8.f4

Instead of advancing the f-pawn, the modern treatment, seen in many games by Kasparov, has become piece play with ♕f3, intending a quick ♕g3, e.g. after 8.0-0 ♗e7 9.♕f3 ♕c7 (9...♕b6 10.♗e3 ♕b7 is also possible) 10.♕g3 0-0 11.♗h6 ♘e8 12.♖ad1 ♗d7 and now there are several options, with a tense struggle ahead.

8...♗b7

After Fischer's accurate move order against his own variation, "White has not even a hint of an advantage," according to Kasparov.

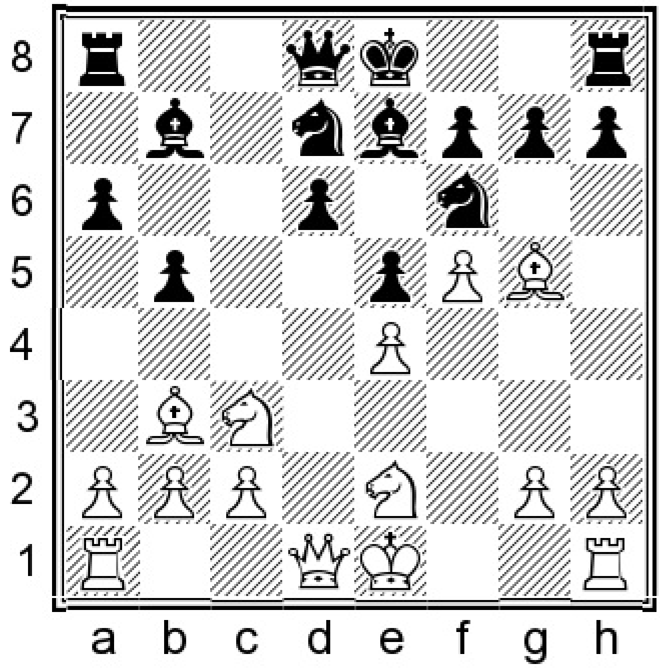
A well-known game of Fischer's, number 17 in his book, Fischer - Tal, Candidates 1959, continued 8...b4 9.♘a4 ♘xe4 (Fischer indicated that 9...♗b7 was also playable and Kasparov included 9...♗e7 among the more solid options, also pointing out that subsequently the experts in this variation now prefer not to rush with playing ...b4. On the morning of the round, Tal had analysed this variation with Averbakh, Koblencs and Petrosian, who was attracted to the move 9...♘xe4; Tal had doubts, but at the board he decided to capture the pawn and accept the risks.) 10.0-0 g6? (Fischer thought that the best defence was 10...♘c5.) 11.f5! ("This riposte caught Tal completely unaware. Black's king, trapped in the centre, will be soon be subject to mayhem.") 11...gxf5 12.♘xf5! ♖g8? (if 12...exf5? then 13.♕d5 ♖a7 14.♕d4; Fischer thought that 12...d5 was necessary.) and after the elegant 13.♗d5! Fischer obtained a winning position, but ... 0–1 in 51 moves.

9.f5 e5 10.♘de2 ♘bd7 11.♗g5

White continues to play in a similar fashion to the plan that Fischer himself employed several times with success: after forcing ...e5, White seizes the d5-square.

But here the position isn't as favourable as, for instance, in Game 14, Fischer - Gadía; 10.♘xc6 is not available, so to exchange the knights White has to resort to a manoeuvre which costs several tempi.

11...♗e7



12.♘g3?

The question mark was awarded by Fischer himself.

In this position, with White, Fischer gave up the idea of reaching the ideal position that we saw in Fischer - Gadía, probably because he knew that here the plan could not be carried out under good conditions.

In Fischer - Zuckerman, US Championship, New York 1965, Fischer opted for 12.♗xf6 ♘xf6 13.♕d3, and although he ended up winning, it wasn’t due to the opening. Fischer commented that here the position is equal; the current engines are even slightly more pessimistic about White’s chances.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

12...♖c8!

Question: Hmm, does this really deserve an exclamation mark? It looks just like a normal move to me.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Not long ago it was realised that the AlphaZero program gives great importance to postponing the decision to castle; this could be for various reasons, such as danger to the king on the wing where castling is planned, uncertainty as to the best destination for the king, etc.

There is nothing new in this idea: Pillsbury is reported to have said “castle because you will or because you must; but not because you can” and Réti wrote something similar, to the effect that the right time to castle is when there is nothing more useful to do.

In this case it was important not to play a 12...0-0 mechanically, as White can accomplish his plan by playing 13.♗xf6 ♘xf6 14.♘h5; it isn’t serious, but why allow it?

There’s another reason why Black delayed castling, as we’ll see later.

13.0-0?!

White makes a seemingly “healthy” move, bringing his king to safety, without ruling out continuing with 14.♗xf6 and ♘h5.

Question: I don’t understand, you said before that 12...♖c8 was designed to combat our well-known plan of 13.♗xf6 ♘xf6 14.♘h5; but I don’t see why this can’t be played now.

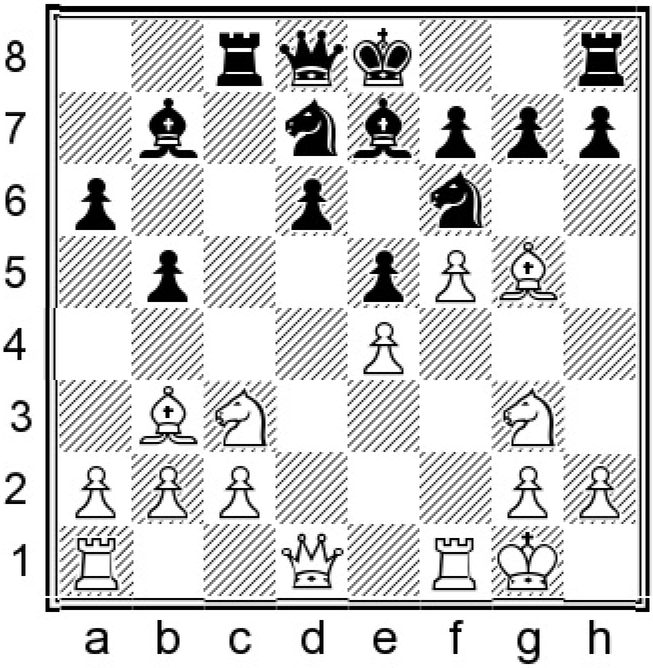
Show/Hide Solution

Answer: There is a reason which discourages this.

Exercise: So, can you now discover how Black should respond to 13.♗xf6 ♘xf6 14.♘h5?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Black could justify his previous move and punish White for the neglect of the vital e4-point with the typical exchange sacrifice 14...♖xc3!, with very good play after 15.♘xf6+ (or 15.bxc3 ♘xe4) 15...♗xf6 16.bxc3 ♗xe4, etc., when the threat of 17...♗h4+ prevents White from regaining control of the d5-square, except at a cost. But soon it will be seen that although this was somewhat inferior for White, it was preferable to the game continuation.



Exercise: What was the untypical but incredibly strong move that Fischer played here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13...h5!!

An astounding move at first sight; Black irrevocably weakens his kingside, but the advantages more than make up for this: White’s plan will be completely nullified and the white pieces will be left badly placed.

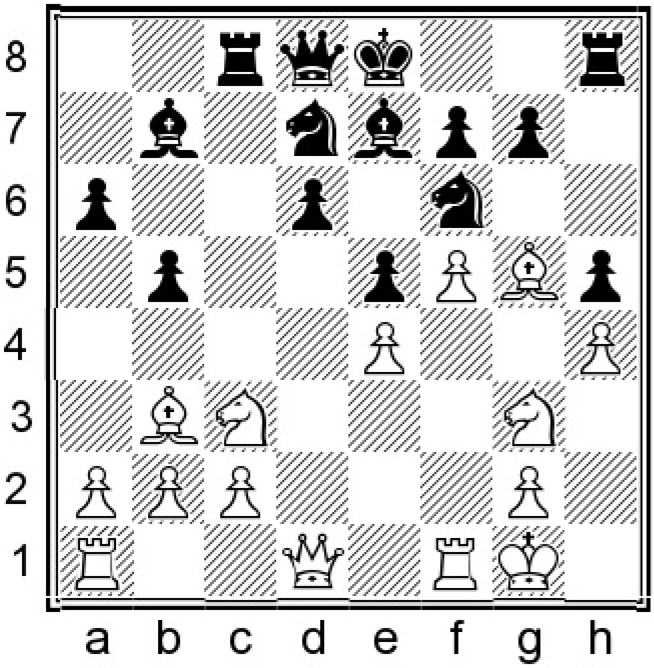
This is the reason for Black’s postponement of castling; the black king will have no problems in the centre, and White must face this strong counterattack, with the now misplaced g3-knight transformed into a tactical weakness. There is an immediate threat of 14...h4, followed by the capture the vitto the centre pawn on e4.

14.h4

This is an important concession, but the alternatives are no better; after e.g. 14.♗h4 Black has many options, such as the exchange sacrifice on c3 in several lines, but also the simple 14...♕b6+ 15.♔h1 ♘g4, when the complications favour Black.

In the event of 14.♗xf6 ♘xf6 15.♕d3, Black can destroy the white centre and increase the power of the b7-bishop with the help of the h-pawn by playing 15...♖xc3! 16.♕xc3 ♕b6+ 17.♖f2 h4, followed by ...♘xe4.

Occupying d5 also fails to dilute the force of the h-pawn in its role as a battering ram; instead of 15.♕d3, for example if 15.♘d5 ♗xd5 (or 15...h4 16.♘xf6+ gxf6 17.♘h5 ♕b6+ 18.♖f2 ♗xe4) 16.♗xd5 then 16...♕b6+ 17.♔h1 h4 18.♘e2 h3, seeking to open lines and infiltrate with ...♕e3, is very unpleasant for White.



Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

14...b4!

This move was questionable before, since it merely forced the knight to leap to d5, but now, with the inclusion of 13...h5 and 14.h4, it favours Black, due to the weakness of the pawn on h4.

15.♗xf6

Equally inadequate was 15.♘d5 ♘xd5 16.♗xd5 ♗xg5 17.hxg5 ♗xd5 18.♕xd5 h4, followed by 19...♕xg5, and it's Black who has the better pieces and the attack; now 19.g6? loses to 19...♕b6+!, vacating d8 for the king and winning a decisive material advantage.

15...♗xf6

Fischer seeks a bigger advantage than after 15...♘xf6, when White would be able to install a knight on e4 after 16.♘d5 ♗xd5 17.exd5 ♘g4 18.♕f3 ♗xh4 19.♘e4.

16.♘d5 ♗xh4 17.♘xh5

“Out of the frying pan, into the fire”; in order not to be left a pawn down, White accepts the opening of the h-file, which promises a dangerous middlegame for his king.

In the event of 17.f6 Black would play 17...g6! (not 17...♗xg3?? 18.fxg7 ♖g8 19.♕xh5, and wins) 18.♕f3 ♗g5!, with the idea of 19...h4, distancing the g3-knight from the e4-square, followed by ...♗xd5 and then capturing the annoying pawn on f6.

Exercise: There are several good moves now; what do you think Fischer played?

Show/Hide Solution

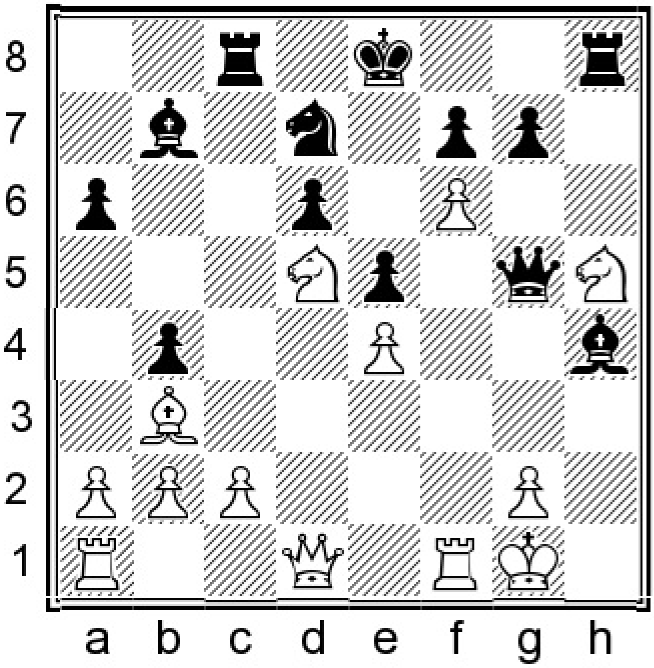
Answer:

17...♕g5

The simplest, bringing the queen to the kingside immediately, with a direct threat. The alternative was to exchange the strong d5-knight right away, but there is no need to do it yet, because the knight is unable to create any serious threats.

The attractive alternative was 17...♗xd5 18.♗xd5 ♕b6+ 19.♔h1 ♘f6, forcing 20.g4, with better prospects for Black after 20...♔e7.

18.f6



Black has a winning position; now he needs to choose between two very good moves.

Exercise: Fischer made the strongest move – what was it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18...g6!

Looking for something more forceful than the (also advantageous) 18...♖xh5 19.♖f5, and here Black can retain a clear advantage with 19...♗f2+! 20.♔xf2 (or 20.♖xf2 ♕h6) 20...♕h4+ 21.♔g1 ♕h2+ 22.♔f2 ♖xf5+ 23.exf5 ♘xf6 24.♘xf6+ gxf6 25.♕g4 ♔e7.

Black is hoping to win by attack, exploiting the open h-file and reckoning that on g7 the knight will be out of play.

19.♘g7+ ♔d8 20.♖f3

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20...♗g3

Continuing with the idea of exploiting the h-file; the threat is now 21...♕h4. In order to parry this, White attacks the g3-bishop a second time, but there is a cost to this.

21.♕d3 ♗h2+ 22.♔f1

Exercise (simple): What is the cost White incurred by playing 21.♕d3?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22...♘c5

Of course, this knight is able to enter play with a gain of time.

23.♖h3 ♖h4

Once again Black plays the simplest move, eschewing complications, even though these are advantageous, after 23...♘xd3 24.♖xh8+ ♔d7, and now for example 25.♗a4+ ♗c6 26.♘b6+ ♔c7 27.♖xc8+ ♔xb6 28.♖xc6+ ♔a5 29.cxd3 ♕e3!.

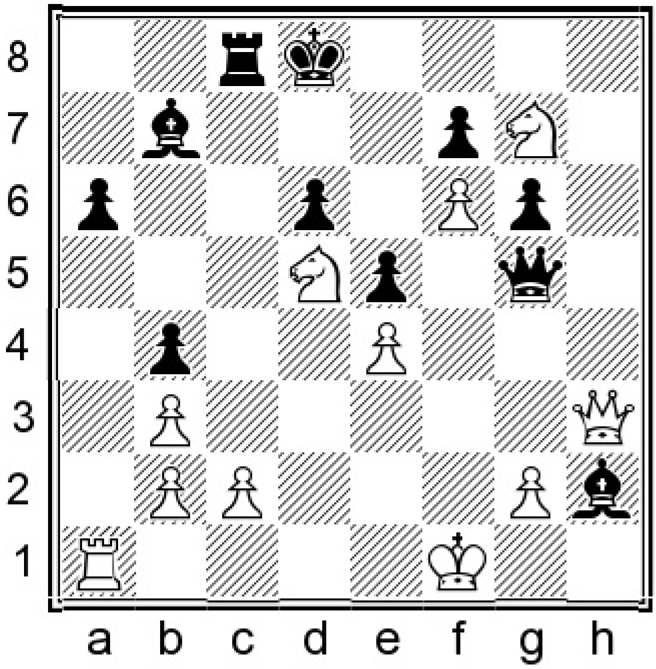
There are more lines to calculate, also favourable to Black, but from the practical point of view Fischer's move is stronger. For an engine it's a different matter of course.

24.♕f3

There now follows a line after which Black will be left with several extra pawns and a secure king, while the g7-knight will remain stuck and the white king exposed.

White rejected an endgame with the same weaknesses arising after 24.♖xh4 ♕xh4 25.♕h3 ♗g3 26.♕xh4 ♗xh4 27.g3 ♗g5!, and White is unable to defend the vital pawn on f6.

24...♘xb3 25.axb3 ♖xh3 26.♕xh3



Exercise (simple): What is the decisive move of the sequence?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

26...♗xd5

The f6-pawn falls and it's "game over"; as we shall see, Fischer expressed it rather more poetically.

27.exd5 ♕xf6+ 28.♔e1 ♕f4

"And since there's nothing left – but emptiness - White resigns." (Fischer).

0–1

1968

Game 38

Another model game in the King’s Indian Attack

After abandoning the Sousse Interzonal Tournament, Fischer began another period of playing very little.

In July 1968 he played a minor tournament in Netanya, Israel, which he won with 11½ points out of 13, 3½ points ahead of the field. His reason for playing, according to what one of the players, the Dane Svend Hamann says in his memoirs, is that the Polish-American Isador Samuel Turover sponsored his appearance to the tune of 3,000 dollars, as he had also previously done to induce Fischer to play in the 1962 Stockholm Interzonal.

Fischer became quite friendly with the Dutch player Hans Ree. Both would go to bed late and would go for walks around the town, while workmen on the street called out. “Hiya Bobby!” as he went by. Fischer would choose the topics of conversation, which ranged from the lack of safety on the streets, to that year’s presidential elections.

Fischer’s interests were not limited to chess. He was a great connoisseur of American literature and even more so of his country’s popular music. He was an avid reader of magazines such as *Mad, Newsweek, Playboy, Time,* etc.

Ree had read that during the 1962 Curaçao Tournament Fischer had made anti-semitic remarks. He asked whether this was true and, if so, then what was he doing in Israel? Fischer admitted having been an anti-semite, but that it was stupid, and added: “Besides, I am half-Jewish, so how can I be an anti-semite?”

Many years later, this argument no longer seemed good to him, even though he was clearly Jewish, not through one parent but through both of them, but by then his mental health was already very poor.

Hamann played Fischer in the first round and lost easily. He also became quite friendly with Fischer during the tournament; for example they would combat the heat by going to the beach and they both complained equally about the food, which was often chicken in all its possible variations. Hamman saw no signs of the antisemitism which flourished later. Unlike Ree, he never succeeded in getting Fischer to talk politics; “he was interested only in chess and in Bobby,” he wrote.

At that time it was usual to exchange telephone numbers when you said goodbye, in case you passed through each other’s home town, and they did that.

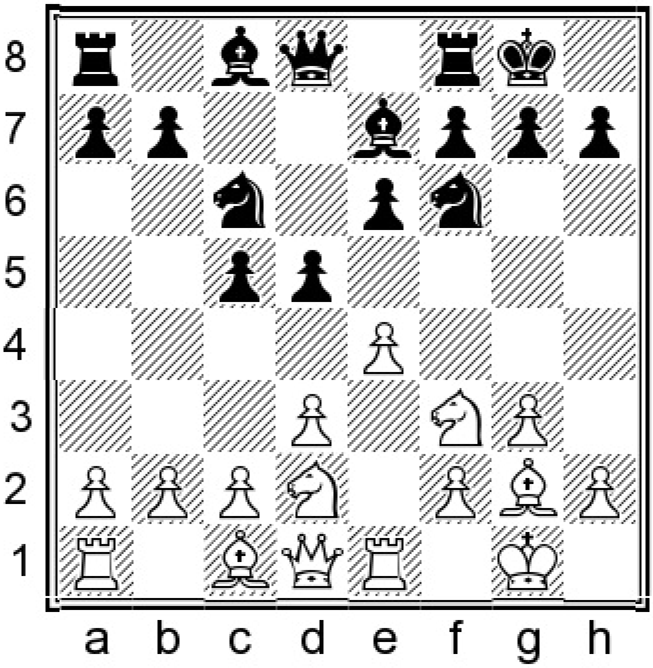
Moving on to our next game, in spite of thinking that the Winawer Variation of the French Defence

(1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♗b4), was anti-positional, as we know, Fischer sometimes preferred to avoid it by playing the King’s Indian Defence with the colours reversed, “and against a rather passive setup of the black pieces.”

(Comments in inverted commas are by Fischer for the Israeli magazine *Shamat*).

Robert Fischer
Uzi Geller
King’s Indian Attack [A08]
Netanya (11), 29.06.1968

1.e4 e6 2.d3 d5 3.♘d2 c5 4.g3 ♘f6 5.♗g2 ♗e7 6.♘gf3 0-0 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.♖e1



We have reached a standard position, one which we saw earlier.

8...♕c7!

Question: Why the exclamation mark?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Fischer gave the move an “exclam,” to emphasise his opinion that “this is better than 8...b5 9.e5 ♘d7 10.♘f1 as in the game Fischer - Myagmarsuren, Sousse 1967.”

9.e5 ♘d7 10.♕e2

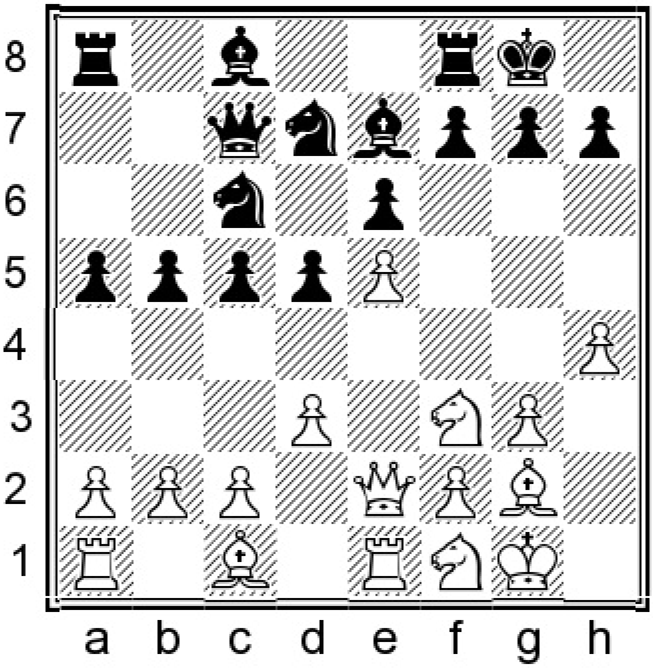
“Now White’s queen may become subject to threats on this square, for example ...♘d4.”

To which we can add that the black queen can also become a tactical weakness on c7, as we shall see.

10...b5

After inserting the moves 8...♕c7 and 10.♕e2, for now the struggle follows the familiar track, with each side operating on "his" wing.

11.h4 a5 12.♘f1



12...♘d4

Black decides to change the structure, this move opens the c-file, justifying Black's 8...♕c7 as well as !? which Fischer awarded it in Informator 6.

Nevertheless, Mark Dvoretsky considered that this knight leap almost always favours White.

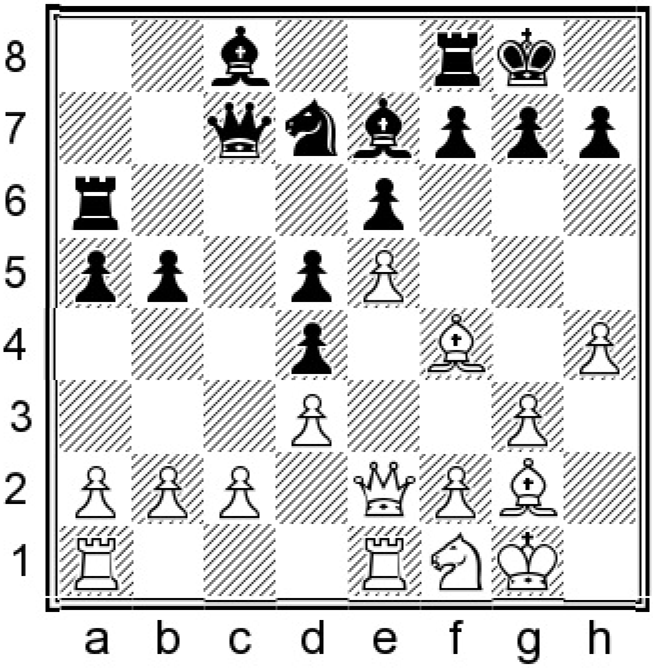
13.♘xd4 cxd4

Question: I understand that it is difficult to evaluate the consequences of 12...♘d4, given that there is no unanimous opinion about it, but nevertheless, tell me something on the position.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Let's see what Fischer says: "Now the both sides have weaknesses: White a backward pawn on the c-file, Black a pawn artificially isolated pawn on d4. White, with latent kingside attacking chances, however, still has an edge.”

14.♗f4 ♖a6!?



“Black decides to bring immediate pressure on White’s helpless c2-pawn, ignoring or overlooking White’s threat of 15.♗xd5.”

Exercise: What did Fischer play?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

15.♘h2!

White continues his thematic knight manoeuvre, heading for g4.

Exercise: Can you show why 15.♗xd5 would have been premature?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Fischer commented that “...after some consideration I rejected this combination because...” after 15.♗xd5?! Black has the intermediate move 15...♗b4!, creating problems for White and removing the bishop from e7 where it was loose.

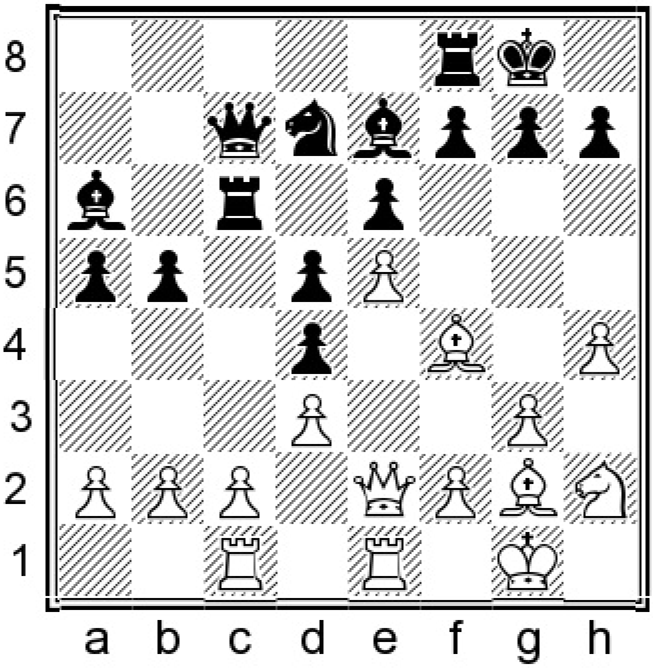
Then 16.♖ed1?? fails to 16...exd5 17.e6 ♖xe6! 18.♕xe6 ♕xf4! 19.♕xd7 ♕f3!, when if the white queen retreats Black has 20...♗h3, while 20.♘h2 also loses to 20...♕xd1+!, with check.

16.♖ec1?? also fails, due to 16...exd5 17.e6 ♖xe6! 18.♕xe6 ♕xf4! 19.♕xd7 ♕xc1, and wins.

Fischer indicated that to maintain the balance, 16.♖eb1! is forced, moving out of reach of the enemy queen, although the black position is slightly more pleasant after 16...exd5 17.e6 ♕b7 18.exd7 ♗xd7, but not 17...♖xe6? 18.♕xe6 ♕xf4 19.♕xd7 ♕f3, because now 20.♘h2! is good, when the black queen can neither capture a rook nor maintain its menacing position.

Dvoretsky also commented that the move played is better than 15.♕g4, since White's attack is very slow and comes to a halt after 15...♔h8 16.♖e2 (intending ♘h2-f3) 16...♖c6 17.♖c1 b4 18.♘h2 ♗a6, threatening ...♗xd3; it is clear that Black wins the attacking race.

15...♖c6 16.♖ac1 ♗a6



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17.♗xd5!

Now this works. "It turns out that Black was not aware of White's tactical possibilities on d5."

Going back, award a question mark to 16...♗a6.

"The right move was 16...♕b6!"; or 16...♗b4, according to Dvoretsky, which is the preference of the current engines.

17...exd5

“Makes it easy, 17...♖c5! [in Informator Fischer changes this to !?] followed by 18...♖fc8 still offered chances of saving the game.”

In Informator Fischer continued his analysis a bit further, indicating that after 18.♗e4! ♖c8 19.♘f3 White would have a clear advantage.

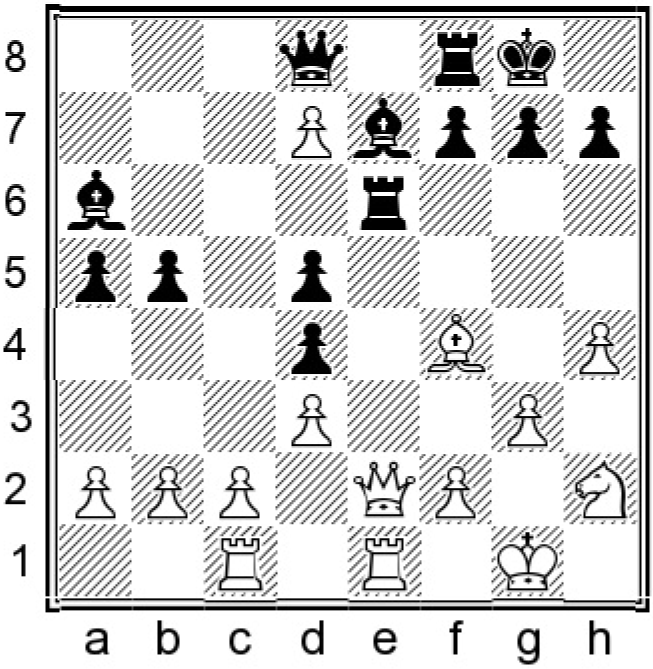
This is convincing, because the d4-will eventually fall, without adequate compensation, let´s continue a little more because White is losing the c2-pawn.

After 19...♖xc2 20.♖xc2 ♕xc2 21.♕xc2 ♖xc2 22.♖b1 it even looks as though Black is better with an active rook on 7th, but in fact he must give up the d4-pawn right away, as 22...♗c5? loses to 23.♘e1, while after almost any other move White plays 23.♘xd4, expelling the rook, when White will indeed have some advantage, with an extra pawn, more space, more active pieces and the threat of ♘c6.

18.e6

More than fifty years ago now, Fischer considered that the black position was lost, but the current engines are not as categorical but still give an advantage to White.

18...♕d8 19.exd7 ♖e6



Exercise (simple): How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20.♕g4!

Of course, now that the smoke has cleared, White returns to his offensive on the kingside under good conditions, with the added bonus that the weakness of d4 is worse than that of c2.

20...f5

“After 20...♕xd7 21.♗e5 wins a pawn and eventually the game. Now the weakened e-file proves Black’s downfall.”

Simplifying first with 21.♖xe6 ♕xe6 22.♕xe6 fxe6 23.♗e5 was another way.

21.♕h5 ♕xd7

Exercise (simple): What did Fischer play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22.♘f3

Of course; White’s only inactive piece joins in the struggle, not only hitting d4, but also including e5 and even g5 as possible destinations.

22...g6 23.♕h6

Without indicating any error on Black’s part since move 18, the engines nevertheless give White a decisive advantage now.

23...♗f6

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

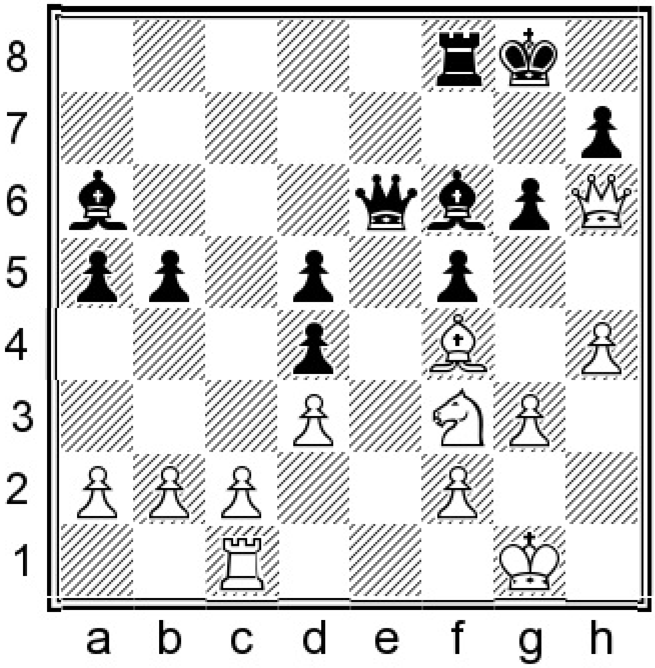
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24.♖xe6

Simple; this is the first step towards seizing the e-file, as Fischer announced, isn't it?

24...♕xe6



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

25.♗e5!!

"Forcing by a little combination the exchange of bishops, creating numerous holes on Black's dark squares. This factor is decisive."

Dvoretsky commented: "An elegant stroke, after which White's positional advantage becomes decisive."

Exercise: But why didn't Fischer play the "obvious" 25.♖e1?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: "Geller's last hope was 25.♖e1? ♕xe1+!! 26.♘xe1 ♗g7! 27.♕g5 ♗f6! and draws."

White could still try 28.♗d6, but after 28...♗xg5 29.♗xf8 ♗c1 the most probable result, after exchanging the pawn on d4 for the one on c2, is indeed a draw.

It’s noteworthy that although the current engines approve of Fischer’s decision, they consider 25.h5 stronger.

25...♗xe5 26.♖e1 f4!

Fischer awards the exclamation mark possibly because this is the only move which gives Black any practical chances; in contrast, 26...♗g7 27.♕xg7+ ♔xg7 28.♖xe6 is much simpler for White.

27.♖xe5 ♕d7

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer now land an almost decisive blow?

Show/Hide Solution

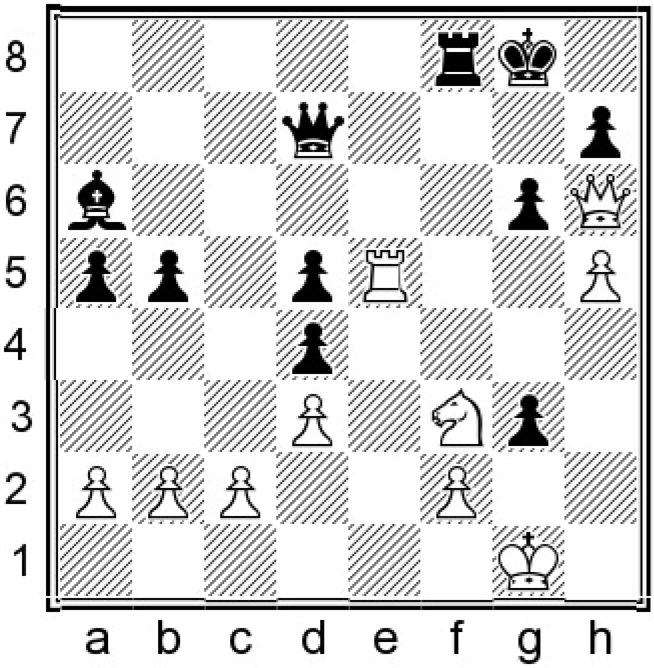
Answer:

28.h5!

“Cracks Black wide open.”

28...fxg3

“If 28...gxh5 then 29.♖g5+.”



Exercise: What had Fischer calculated?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29.hxg6!!

The most crushing, but leaving the knight en prise required tactical justification, of course.

29...gxf2+

"Or 29...♖xf3 30.♖e8+!! and the g-pawn queens." In Informator Fischer continued the line a bit further: 30...♕xe8 31.♕xh7+ ♔f8 32.g7+, and wins.

30.♔xf2 hxg6 31.♕xg6+ ♕g7! 32.♖g5!

"The finishing touch: exchanging queens costs Black his bishop on a6."

32...♖f7

"And here, while I was trying to decide on 33.♕h6 or 33.♕h5."

1–0

Game 39

Another triumph, in Yugoslavia

After spending a few weeks in Israel and later in Greece, in September 1968 Fischer played in another tournament, in Vinkovci, Yugoslavia.

This was much stronger than the previous one but again he won easily, scoring 11 points out of 13, two points ahead of Matulovic and Hort; further back were Gheorghiu, Ivkov, Byrne, etc.

In the third round in a magnificent game he defeated the player who finished second.

Milan Matulovic
Robert Fischer
Sicilian Defence [B91]
Vinkovci (3), 09.09.1968

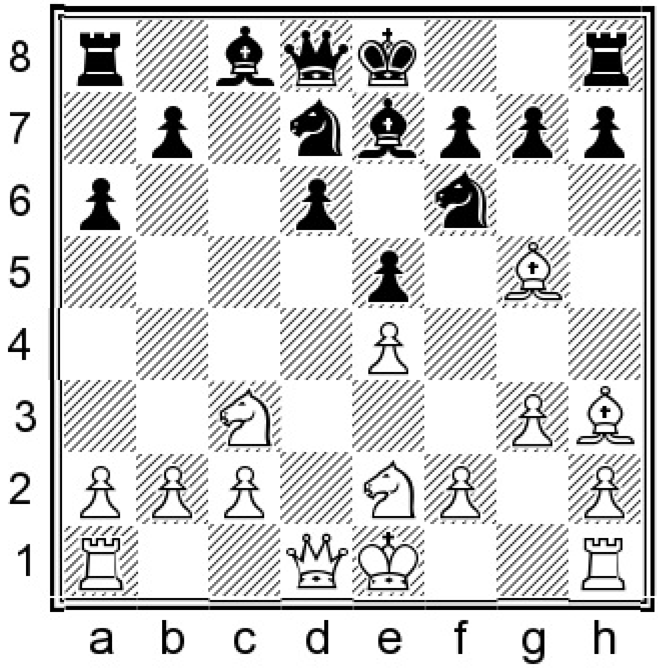
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.g3 e5 7.♘de2 ♗e7 8.♗g5

Instead of the usual 8.♗g2, White starts the struggle for the d5-square, seeking to eliminate a one of the defenders of that square at an opportune moment. Another favourable scenario would be to exchange the light-squared bishops and leave Black with his “bad” e7-bishop.

8...♘bd7

After this move White can carry out his idea; the alternative was 8...♗e6, with the idea of ...♘bd7, but allowing 9.♗xf6 ♗xf6 and a later ♘d5.

9.♗h3



Exercise: What would you play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

9...b5!

Black tries to compensate for the loss of control of d5 by gaining space on the queenside.

Of course it isn’t acceptable for Black to submissively allow the exchange of the light-squared bishops with 9...♘b6, because although White’s kingside would be left slightly weakened, this can’t be exploited, and the loss of Black’s important defensive bishop is more important; there would follow 10.♗xc8 and 11.♗xf6, fully justifying White’s idea of seizing the d5-square.

9...0-0 is natural, but then Fischer suggested 10.a4, restricting Black’s activity on his stronger wing; another idea would be 10.♗xd7 ♕xd7 11.♕d3 or 11.♕d2, with the idea of queenside castling.

10.a4?

White increases the tension on the queenside, but this will not work out in his favour.

There was no need for Black to fear 10.♗xf6 ♘xf6 11.♗xc8 ♕xc8, with an eye on h3 and with the idea of castling, followed by ...♖d8, preparing an opportune...d5, with good play.

Exercise: How would you reply to the best move, which is 10.♗xd7+?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: With 10...♕xd7!, making room on d8 for the bishop, with the idea of answering 11.♗xf6 ♗xf6 12.♘d5 with 12...♗d8, reaching a positionally complex situation where White has a good knight on d5 but no obvious plan, while Black, after castling, can expand on the queenside and can also consider ...g6, followed by ...f5.

10...b4 11.♘d5

It's now clear that White's idea of dominating the d5-square and occupying it with a strong knight has failed.

Exercise: Why did White now give up the idea of trying to occupy d5 with 11.♗xd7+?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Because Black would not allow it; after 11...♕xd7 12.♗xf6, Black would have 12...bxc3!, when 13.♗xg7? would be bad due to 13...♖g8 14.♗h6 and now 14...♕h3! gives Black a clear advantage according to Fischer, e.g. 15.♗e3 cxb2 16.♖b1 ♕g2 17.♖g1 ♕xe4 18.♖xb2 ♗e6, attacking a4 and with the white king very badly situated.

There is also the simple 14...cxb2 15.♖b1 ♖b8 16.♘c3 ♕c6!, attacking the knight, as well as threatening 17...♗h3 and 17...d5, with a big advantage.

In the event of 13.♗xe7 cxb2 14.♖b1 ♕xe7 15.♖xb2 ♗h3, Black's superiority would also be evident.

11...♘xd5 12.♕xd5 ♖b8

Keeping all Black's options open; given the somewhat loose positions of the white pieces, 12...♘b6 was also interesting, when a possible sequence is 13.♕c6+ ♔f8 14.♗xe7+ ♔xe7 15.♗xc8 ♖xc8 16.♕b7+ ♕c7 17.♕xc7+ ♖xc7, with a slightly better ending for Black; Fischer's move is stronger.

13.♗xe7

Exercise: How should Black recapture the bishop?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13...♔xe7!

Giving extra protection to the d6-pawn, and with the immediate threat of 14...♘f6, now that there is no check on c6. White cannot take advantage of the situation of the black king due to his lag in development.

The choice is relatively easy, because after 13...♕xe7? 14.0-0-0 White is no longer worse.

14.♕d2 ♘f6

Development with a gain of time due to the attack on the e4-pawn; this presents White with an unpleasant decision: lose a tempo with his bishop by retreating it, or exchange the bishop and thus speed up Black's development?

15.♗g2

White had to choose between two evils. Fischer considered that 15.♗xc8 was preferable, although after 15...♕xc8 16.f3 the white position would be slightly inferior.

Exercise: What would you play after 16.f3?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Fischer indicated 16...♕c5!, preventing White from castling kingside, and preparing a possible ...d5, although 16...♖d8! was also strong, lending more force to the timely ...d5 break, perhaps preceded by 17...♕c5+ in the event of 17.0-0, and Black's greater activity would become apparent.

15...♗b7

Fischer considered this move to be a mistake.

Question: What? Black gains a developing move "for free" "by threatening the e4- pawn, so why is this a mistake?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Well, perhaps it would be an exaggeration to call it a mistake. Black is still slightly better after this, but Fischer considered that 15...♕b6 was more precise, to which he gave an exclamation mark.

It's notable that the current engines (in early 2021) don't consider it necessary to do anything special and although they consider the move suggested by Fischer to be good, they prefer 15...a5 (to prevent 16.a5), followed by ...♗e6, or in the reverse order, followed by ...♕b6, ...♖fc8, etc.

16.♕d3

Fischer considered that 16.♕e3 was preferable, seeking to complete development quickly after 16...♕c7 with 17.0-0!, since Black can't capture on c2 (17...♕xc2) due to 18.♖ac1, followed by 19.♖c7+, and wins, but after natural moves such as 17...a5, planning a timely ...♗a6 and/or 17...♖hd8 or 17...♖hc8, Black remains better; neither white minor piece is well placed and the struggle is developing on the queenside, which favours Black.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer reply?

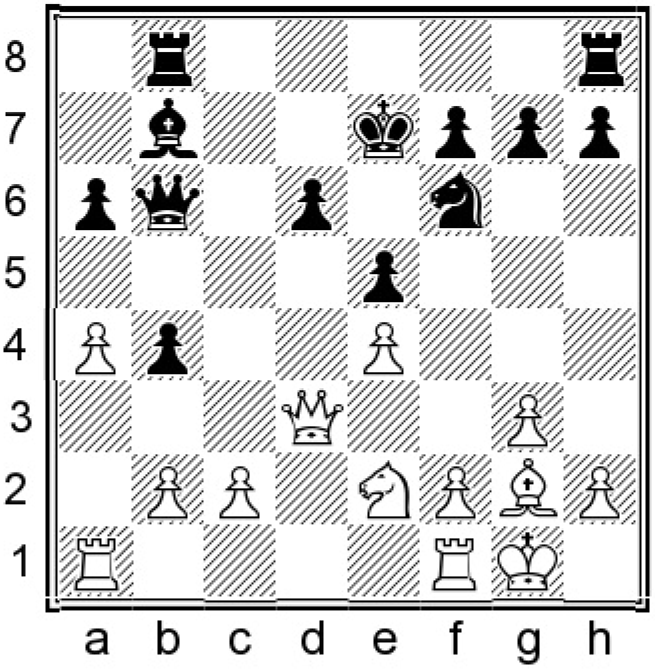
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16...♕b6

Of course, this move to control dark squares could have been prevented with 16.♕e3. Black need not fear 17.a5 in view of 17...♕c7, with the idea of exploiting the b5-square, abandoned with 17.a5, by means of ...♗c6-b5.

17.0-0



Exercise (simple): How did Fischer proceed now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17...a5!

This move has been in the air for several moves. Before bringing the only inactive piece into play with e.g. 17...♖hc8, Black expands his possibilities, with an imminent ...♗a6 now possible.

18.♖fd1

Question: Why didn't White try to close the queenside (or revive his knight in the event of an en passant capture on c3) with 18.c4?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Because Black would play 18...bxc3 19.♘xc3 ♗a6, and wins a pawn for no compensation.

18...♗a6 19.♕d2 ♖hc8 20.h3

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20...h5!

Not hurrying; Black prevents White from expanding with g4.

This is the strongest move from the practical point of view, but it wasn't the only good move.

20...♖c4 was also strong, according to Fischer; White could play 21.g4, to defend with 22.♘g3, and in the event of 21...♘xe4?! 22.♗xe4 ♖xe4 23.♘g3 he would obtain strong counterplay, but instead Black could play 21...g6!, and after 22.♘g3 ♖bc8 Black continues to make progress on "his" wing, while the white knight on g3 lacks prospects.

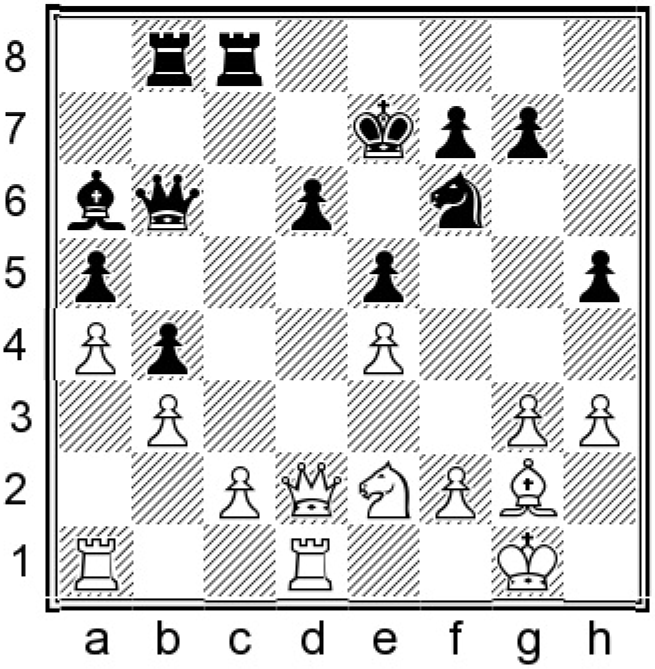
Exercise: On the other hand 20...♕c6 was questionable, according to Fischer; why?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Because White would have the spectacular and effective 21.♘d4!!, for example 21...exd4 22.e5 ♘e4 23.exd6+ ♔f8 24.♕f4! ♗b7 25.♖xd4, regaining the piece with a reasonable position.

21.b3?!

This creates a new weakness and in fact it weakens the whole structure, without being at all forced. It was preferable to play 21.♖ac1, although after 21...♖c7 the white position would remain unpleasant.



Exercise: How did Fischer demonstrate the drawback of White's last move?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21...♗xe2!

The first step, the passive knight was the main supporter of the white position.

22.♕xe2

Exercise: And now, what is the second step?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22...♖c3!

Black exploits the weakness created on c3 with a gain of time by attacking g3 and now he is ready to double rooks.

23.♖d3 ♖bc8 24.♖xc3 ♖xc3 25.♔h2

Exercise: White has exchanged a rook, but his position hasn't improved. All the black pieces are better than their white counterparts. How did Fischer continue?

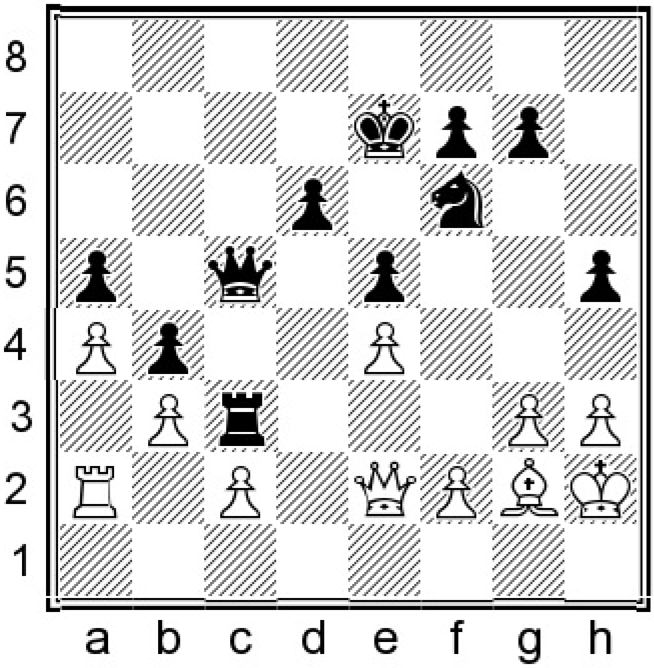
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

25...♕c5!

Forcing a depressingly passive reply, since 26.♖c1? would fail to 26...♖xb3!.

26.♖a2



Exercise: What did Fischer play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

26...g6!

Black defends the h5-pawn and now his knight is free to improve its position. Black is preparing the manoeuvre ...♘d7-b8-c6-d4, and White is powerless, because he is playing practically a rook down.

27.♗f1

Exercise: If 27...♘d7 White can plan to improve his bishop with ♕d2 and ♗d3; this is no big deal, but what do you think Black played now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

27...♕d4

Without allowing White that pleasure.

28.f3?

Exercise: White didn’t want to play the sad 28.♗g2, but the move played is worse, and now Black has several good moves. What do you think Fischer chose?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

28...♖e3!

Black keeps gaining ground, prior to infiltrating the white position. Now 29.♕f2 fails to 29...♖xe4.

Another idea was 28...h4!, to weaken the kingside; if 29.gxh4 then 29...♘h5-f4, while after 29.g4 ♖e3 30.♕g2 (if 30.♕f2 then 30...♖xe4) 30...♘xe4! 31.fxe4 ♖g3 is crushing.

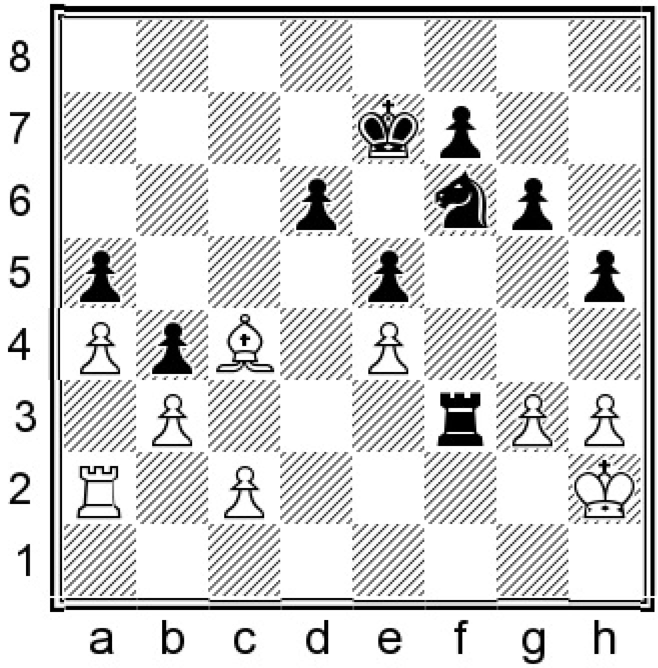
29.♕g2 ♕d1!

White is reduced to total passivity, and Black has no difficulty in converting his advantage.

30.♗c4

In the event of 30.♗d3, it is possible to capture on f3, e.g., after 30...♕xf3 31.♕xf3 ♖xf3 32.♔g2 ♖e3 33.♔f2 ♖xe4 34.♗xe4 ♘xe4+, followed by 35...d5, with advantage to Black, but as White isn’t threatening anything, it is even stronger to play 30...g5! or 30...h4!, as indicated by Fischer.

30...♕xf3 31.♕xf3 ♖xf3



Now, with the bishop on c4 the rook isn't trapped, so it isn't necessary to give up the exchange as in the previous note. The rest is simple.

32.♔g2 ♖e3 33.♗d3 ♘xe4 34.♗xe4 ♖xe4 35.♔f2 d5 36.♖a1 d4 37.♖d1 ♖e3 38.h4 ♖c3 39.♖d2 ♔e6 40.♔g2 f5

0–1

Game 40

"How Good is Your Chess" set by Bobby Fischer

As we mentioned, Bobby Fischer had a column in *Boys Life*, the official magazine of the American Boy Scouts. There were eighteen editions between December 1966 and December 1969.

His contribution was varied; he answered readers' questions and the material could be for beginners or at a higher level, such as the game with Myagmarsuren.

In this case, I suggest that you participate in the edition where he used the system of guessing the next move, generally known in English as "How Good Is Your Chess?".

There are more exercises and comments than in the original; the ones by Fischer are between inverted commas.

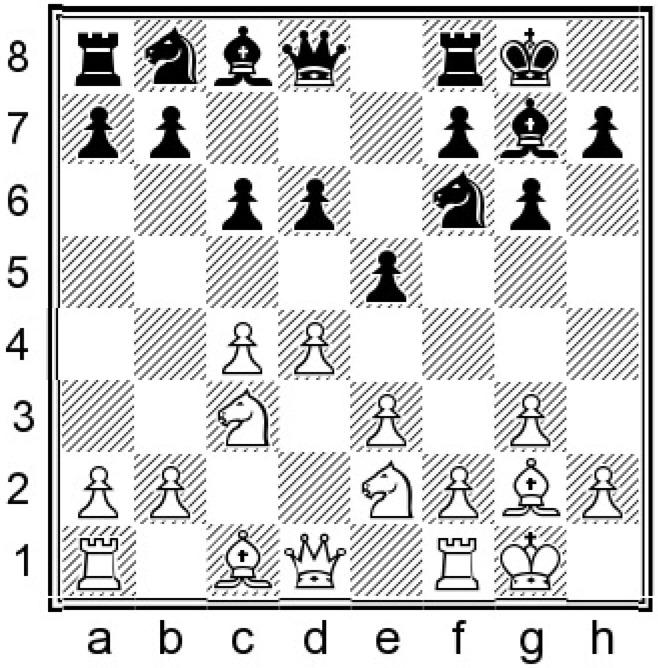
Emil Nikolic
Robert Fischer
King's Indian Defence [E61]
Vinkovci (9), 18.09.1968

1.c4 g6 2.♘c3 ♗g7 3.g3 e5 4.♗g2 d6 5.e3?!

In Informator 6 Fischer criticised this move and instead gave 5.♘f3! f5 6.d3, with a slight advantage to White.

5...♘f6 6.♘ge2 0-0 7.0-0 c6 8.d4

In Informator Fischer gave 8.d3 ♖e8 9.e4 a6! 10.a4 a5!, with equality; this manoeuvre, to provoke a4, weakening b4 and c5, is typical of many King's Indian positions.



Fischer was very critical of White's setup. He wrote: "Both kings are now safe behind their fianchettoed bishops. You should try this setup too. It will prevent a quick checkmate even against a very strong player!".

Question: In that case, what is there to criticise about the white setup?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Fischer provides the answer: "Things look pretty even, but do you notice that White's knight has no place to go? Also that the bishop at c1 isn't very active, is it? Poor planning on White's part."

Exercise: "Now, what do you think is a good move? Should I play 8...exd4, 8...e4 or 8...♖e8?".

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

8...♖e8!

"I moved 8...♖e8 because if 8...exd4 then 9.exd4 and White has freed his bishop on c1. If 8...e4 then 9.♘xe4 costs me a pawn for nothing. After 8...♖e8 my thought was then to move 9...e4 – sealing in both white bishops at once!".

9.♖b1

In Informator Fischer indicated this was bad (it was left unmarked in the magazine article) and he gave these alternatives: exchanging queens with 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♕xd8 ♖xd8, or playing 9.♕c2 ♕e7 10.e4 exd4 11.♘xd4 ♘xe4 12.♘xe4 ♗xd4 13.♖d1 [The current engines prefer 13.♗g5!, followed by ♖ad1] 13...♗e5!, provoking f4 to reduce the scope of the c1-bishop, 14.f4 ♗g7 15.♘xd6 ♗g4 16.♘xe8 ♗xd1, in both cases with a slight advantage to Black.

It's possible that 11...♘bd7 should be preferred, though, given that in this last line 13.♗g5! (as mentioned above) seems to give White the advantage.

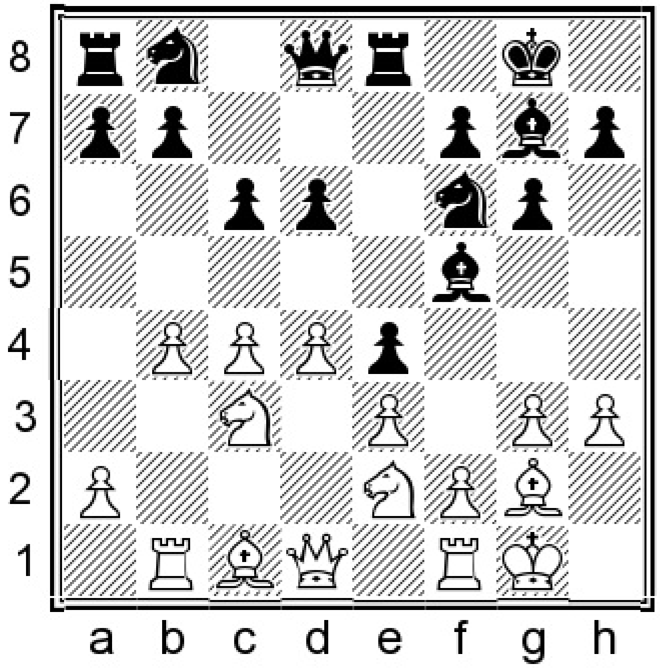
9...e4!

Fischer considered that this should have been prevent at all costs, and that Black already had a clear advantage.

10.b4

"That pesky black pawn of mine on e4 is cramping White's whole game. (Some of you long-memory readers may recall a similar deal in my game with Myagmarsuren.) The only way to get rid of the pawn on e4 is by f3 - which leads to a weakening of White's e-pawn. There is no good way for him to get rid of that pawn. My plan is now all mapped out – I'm going to bring tremendous pressure to bear on his kingside by manoeuvring my pieces into that area. Let's follow it."

10...♗f5! 11.h3



Exercise: “Now should I move 11...♕d7 or 11...h5?”.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

11...h5!

“I didn’t move 11...♕d7 because I’d be blocking my queen’s knight’s square. Also, he could win a piece with 12.g4! – no small matter.”

12.♘f4 ♘bd7 13.a4

Exercise: “What would you play for, 13...g5 or 13...♘f8?”.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13...♘f8

“Playing 13...g5? is a blunder because of 14.♘xh5. The ...♘f8 move is part of my attacking strategy. Next it is heading for h7, then g5 – menacing White’s weak squares.”

It’s notable that for the third time Fischer includes the option of a clearly bad move, in this case one that loses a pawn, possibly for the benefit of novice readers.

14.c5?

“14.b5! was better.”

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

14...d5

Of course, slowing down White’s attack, as it “keeps him from opening up the centre and diverting my attack.”

15.b5 ♘8h7

The knight follows its familiar route.

16.♗d2 ♘g5 17.♖b2

Question: What a strange move! Isn’t 17.a5 better?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes, White’s move isn’t very beneficial, but 17.a5 would involve giving up material: 17.♖b2 is “one of those ‘mysterious’ rook moves because Black was threatening 17...♘f3+ 18.♗xf3 exf3 opening up on the rook and 19.♖b2 g5 trapping the knight!”.

17...♕d7 18.♔h2

In Informator Fischer indicated that 18.h4?! would allow 18...♗g4! 19.hxg5 ♗xd1 20.gxf6 ♗f3 21.fxg7 g5! 22.♘fe2 ♕g4 23.♖e1 h4, and wins.

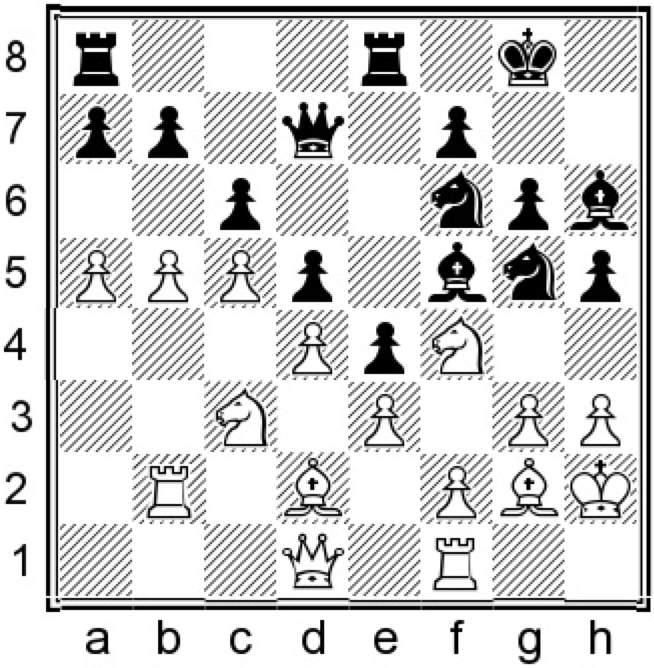
18...♗h6!

This preparatory move is reminiscent of 16.♗h3! in his game against Myagmarsuren. In this case the idea isn’t to hinder f3; instead it’s another measure to strengthen the attack; the bishop makes room for the king on g7, clearing Black’s back rank for the rooks.

19.a5

White continues his queenside offensive; this is also the top suggestion of the engines.

It was possibly more tenacious to play 19.♖h1 first, but Black would have continued to make progress on the kingside with 19...♔g7, preparing to open lines with the h4-break.



Exercise: "Now Black has built up maximum force with five pieces zeroed in – with more to come. The question is, how to break through? Should I now move 19...h4, 19...♗g4 or 19...♘f3+?".

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19...♗g4!!

"I thought a long time about this. 19...h4 didn't pose an immediate threat - but it's not a bad move. 19...♘f3+ was also a possibility with 20.♗xf3 exf3 21.♕xf3 ♗xf4 22.gxf4 cxb5 and Black gets his pawn back with a very good game, because if White takes on b5 then ...♗d3! wins the exchange. But 19...♗g4! leads to a series of forced moves and now my rooks come to the attack along the h-file."

We can see that the Fischer's suggestions are all aggressive moves, which is permissible because his attack is so advanced that in this case it isn't necessary to prevent 20.a6 by playing 19...a6.

20.hxg4

“White will not survive long after 20.♕b3 ♘f3+ 21.♗xf3 (21.♔h1 ♗xf4) 21...♗xf3 [21...exf3 obtains an equally effective attack] 22.bxc6 bxc6 23.♕b7 ♕f5 24.♕xc6 ♗xf4 followed by ...♘g4+.”

In Informator Fischer continued this line further: 25.gxf4 ♘g4+ 26.♔g3 h4+ 27.♔xh4 ♔g7 28.♕xd5 ♖h8+ 29.♔g3 ♖xh3+ 30.♔xh3 ♘e5+, followed by mate.

20...hxg4

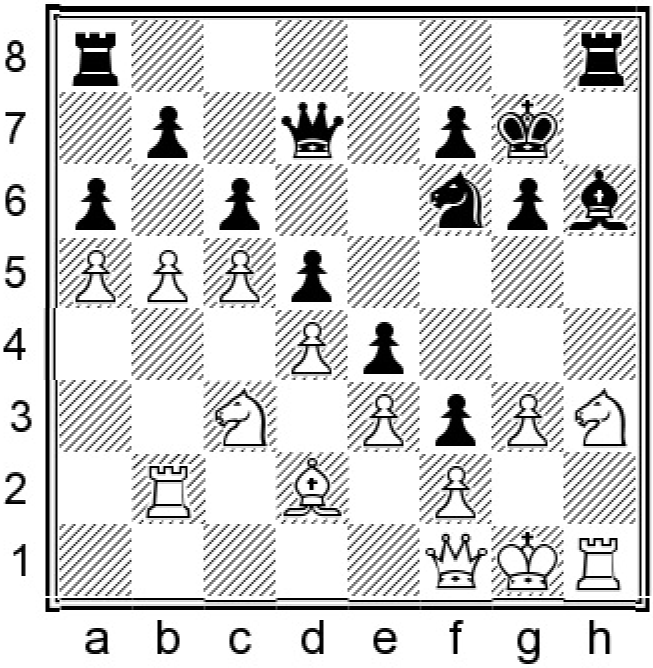
In Informator Fischer indicated that White has a winning advantage; over fifty years later the current engines agree.

21.♖h1

“Making room for the king to start running towards the queenside. But there is no time. A weird defensive possibility was 21.♗h1!? to make room for the king on g2, but then 21...♘f3+ 22.♔g2 ♗xf4 23.exf4 (In Informator Fischer added the variation 23.gxf4 ♔g7 24.♖g1 ♖h8 25.♔f1 ♘xg1 26.♔xg1 ♖xh1+ 27.♔xh1 g3 28.♕f1 ♖h8+ 29.♔g1 ♘g4! 30.fxg3 ♘h2, and wins) 23...♕f5 24.♖g1 ♕h5 25.♔f1 ♕h2 26.♗xf3 exf3 27.♗e3 ♖xe3! 28.fxe3 ♕xb2, with an easy win.”

21...♘f3+ 22.♗xf3 gxf3 23.♔g1

In Informator Fischer mentioned 23.♘h3!? ♔g7 24.♔g1 ♖h8 25.♕f1 a6!, terminating the line without an evaluation.



Question: Is the situation really so clear? White has an extra piece and there is no immediate black threat.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Agreed, but White is so poorly coordinated that he can hardly move; he's very cramped by Black's powerful pawn structure. Black can make progress with his winning attack along the h-file, slowly but completely unhindered. Black's main idea, unless there is something more direct, would be to double rooks with ...♖h7 and ...♖ah8, followed by ...♗g5.

If the white queen leaves f1 then Black has 26...♗xe3!, while other moves can be answered with preparing to invade along the h-file, e.g. 26.bxc6 bxc6 27.♖b6 ♗g5! 28.♘xg5 ♖xh1+ 29.♔xh1 ♖h8+ 30.♔g1 ♕g4, and the queen reaches the h-file; if White then tries 31.♘xf7 it's not even necessary to take the knight; Black wins with 31...♖h1+!! 32.♔xh1 ♕h5+ 33.♔g1 ♘g4, and mate is unpreventable.

Stockfish 13 (in early 2021) sees no defence for White.

Let's get back to the game.

Exercise: How did the offensive continue after 23.♔g1?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23...♗xf4!

The first step, designed not only to eliminate a good defender.

24.exf4

Exercise (simple): What's the second step then?

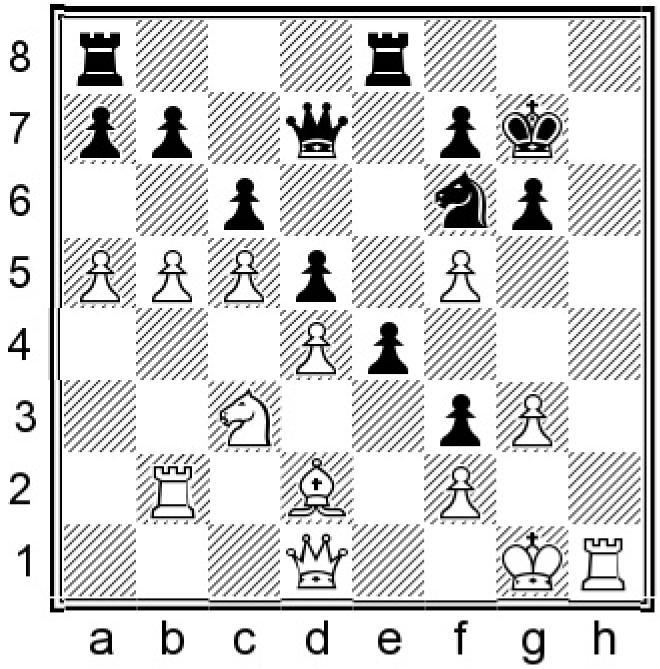
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24...♔g7!

"My winning plan is to play ...♖h8, trade rooks on h1, bring the queen down to h3 check, then ...♕g2 mate. And there's not much White can do about it - with most of his forces out of action on the queenside."

25.f5



Exercise: “Now do I play 25...♖h8 or 25...♕xf5?”.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

25...♖h8

“I play 25...♖h8, of course.” But Black must still be careful. “25...♕xf5 would be a very serious mistake, actually endangering the win because of 26.♗h6+!, and Black won’t be able to operate on the h-file.”

26.♗h6+ ♖xh6 27.♖xh6 ♔xh6 28.♕d2+

“There was a pretty finish for Black after 28.a6 ♕xf5! [in Informator Fischer left off the exclamation mark; this is just one of several ways to win. White is also powerless against the attack along the h-file after e.g. 28...bxa6.] 29.axb7 ♖h8 30.bxc6 ♔g7 31.b8=♕ ♖h1+!;” in contrast, he gave this move two exclamation marks in Informator, where he continued the line all the way to mate: 32.♔xh1 ♕h3+ 33.♔g1 ♕g2++.

28...g5 29.bxc6 ♕xf5! 30.♘d1

“Or 30.cxb7 ♕h3 and mates very shortly.”

30...♕h3 31.♘e3 ♔g6

If 32.cxb7 then 32...♖h8.

0–1

Game 41

The cheese sandwich debt

In October 1968 Fischer travelled to Lugano in Switzerland, where he was due to play in the Olympiad. However, he considered that the playing hall was a complete disaster, poorly ventilated, badly lit, etc. Even the Soviet players and the leader of the American team, George Koltanowski, agreed with him. Fischer suggested some improvements to the deficiencies; one of his conditions was to play in a private room, and when his demands were not met, he left.

He didn't take part in the 1969 USA Championship either. This was a qualifying tournament for the 1970 Interzonal, so he seemed to be bidding a definitive farewell to his aspirations for the world title.

Fischer played only one game in the whole of this period, in a match between the Manhattan Chess Club and the Marshall Chess Club, in New York in November 1968. Fischer contributed to the Manhattan team's easy victory.

Let's return for a moment to the Netanya Tournament, recalling that it was usual then for players to exchange telephone numbers, in case they ever happened to be in each other's home town. Fischer and the Dane Sven Hamann did so.

Hamann did not think they would ever see each other again, but he relates in his memoirs that in October his telephone rang: "Hi, it's Bobby." He was in Copenhagen for a short time after playing in Vinkovci.

"Anyway he wanted to meet, probably because he was bored. I do not pretend that it was me or my brilliant conversation."

Hamman went to fetch him from his hotel and they went back to his house. "My then wife made a big tray of cheese sandwiches for the three of us – she thought. Bobby spied my Russian chess magazines and began to devour them as fast as he ate the sandwiches. In the end, I really wanted to have just one sandwich and reached out for the last one, but he was faster."

Hamann was amazed at the astonishing speed with which Fischer read the Russian magazines; he immediately understood the point to the positions and combinations. Some hours later their meeting came to an end and he took Fischer back to his hotel.

"He probably forgot about me and the visit very soon. But not the chess. In *Shakhmatny Bulletin*, issue number 9, 1968, he had found an article by Evgeny Gik about a variation in what we now call the Grand Prix Attack, where White sacrifices a pawn with f5. Nowadays it is standard, but back then it was quite new."

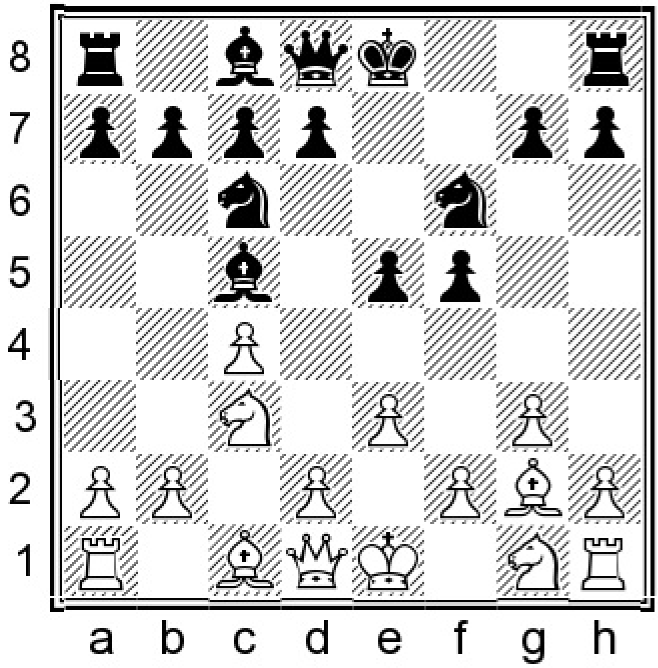
Little more than a month later Fischer played it, with the colours reversed and a tempo less.

Anthony Saidy
Robert Fischer

English Opening [A25]

Metropolitan League, New York, 11.1968

1.c4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.g3 f5 4.♗g2 ♘f6 5.e3 ♗c5



6.d3

6.♘ge2 would have prevented what follows; apparently Saidy was afraid of 6...e4. But 7.d3 is fine for White, since objectively it isn’t necessary to prevent Black’s next move.

6...f4

This sacrifice is quite usual with colours reversed, after (to the line) 1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.f4 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.♗c4 e6 6.f5, but here White has the extra move d3.

In his comments in *New in Chess* magazine Peter Heine Nielsen, quoting Hamman´s autobiography, notes that Fischer added a question mark to this sacrifice on his scoresheet, presumably after the end of the game, of course.

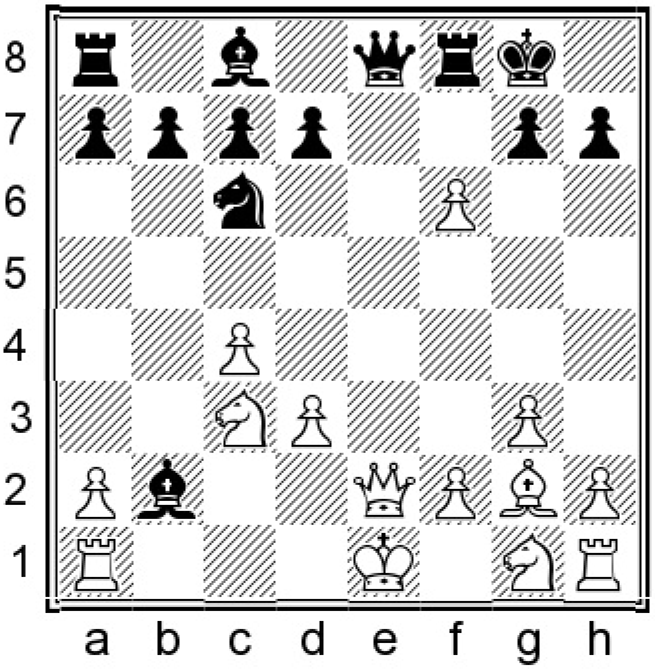
7.exf4 0-0 8.♘ge2

The current engines have no prejudices and are unafraid of the pressure on f2; they give 8.fxe5!, when 8...♘xe5? is impossible due to 9.d4.

There are several possibilities, but the extra tempo makes itself felt, e.g. 8...♕e7 9.♘f3 (9.♗e3 ♗xe3 10.exf6 ♕xf6 11.♘f3 ♗d4 is another possibility) 9...♘xe5 10.0-0, with advantage to White.

After 8...♕e8 there is 9.♗e3! ♗xe3 10.exf6!, which at first sight is unimpressive, since Black has

10...♗c1+ 11.♕e2 ♗xb2.



Exercise: How can it be shown that this line doesn't favour Black?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: With the crushing 12.f7+!, and White wins decisive material; if 12...♕xf7 then 13.♕xb2, and wins, while 12...♔xf7 13.♗d5+ allows White to block the e-file and then capture the bishop on b2 after 13...♔f6 14.♘e4+, or 13...♔g6 14.♗e4+.

Perhaps best is 8...♖e8, e.g. 9.f4 d6 10.♗xc6 bxc6 11.d4 ♗b4 12.♘f3 ♗h3, which is less clear, although there are several alternatives for White.

8...♕e8

The typical plan for Black in this position, copying those of White in the Grand Prix Attack, consists of playing, after suitable preparation, ...♕h5, ...♗h3, ...♘g4, etc., with a dangerous offensive against the white castled position.

9.0-0

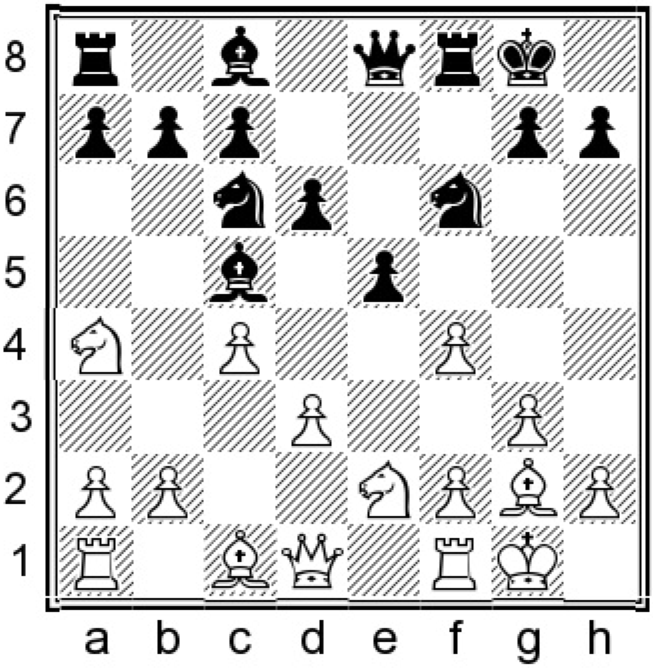
White is playing good, healthy moves; instead, 9.fxe5?! ♘g4 would complicate the game and be inconsistent with the previous one; 9.♘b5 was also worth consideration, but White prefers to play safe. Black has still to demonstrate the validity of his pawn sacrifice.

9...d6 10.♘a4

Eliminating the annoying bishop which is aimed at f2 and gaining the bishop pair; this is another good, healthy move, eschewing complications.

Another possibility was to neutralise the black bishop and at the same time improve White's development with 10.♗e3. Black has some compensation for the pawn after 10...♗xe3 11.fxe3 exf4 12.exf4 ♕e3+ 13.♔h1 ♗g4, but 12.♘xf4! Is better, returning the pawn, and after 12...♕xe3+ 13.♔h1 ♗g4 14.♕b3, followed by ♖ae1, White has the better game.

The engines suggest another way which also maintains some advantage: 10.fxe5 dxe5 11.♗e3.



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

10...♗d4!

This is equivalent to saying "Yes, you can exchange the bishop, but only on my terms." This is the first of four strong moves in succession by Fischer.

11.♘xd4

Nielsen comments that Fischer gave this move a question mark.

In *Chess Review* 11.fxe5 was suggested, and after 11...dxe5 12.♘xd4 exd4 13.♘c5 the knight re-enters play advantageously.

Fischer would possibly have replied 11...♗g4! and the situation is less clear; if 12.h3?! then 12...♘xe5! 13.hxg4? ♘fxg4 14.♘f4 ♖xf4 15.♗xf4 ♕h5, with a winning attack.

Exercise (simple): Why did Fischer disapprove of 11.♘xd4? How did Black recapture on d4?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

11...exd4!

Of course; now Black has achieved something; the knight on a4 is left misplaced.

12.h3

Exercise: How did Fischer continue now?

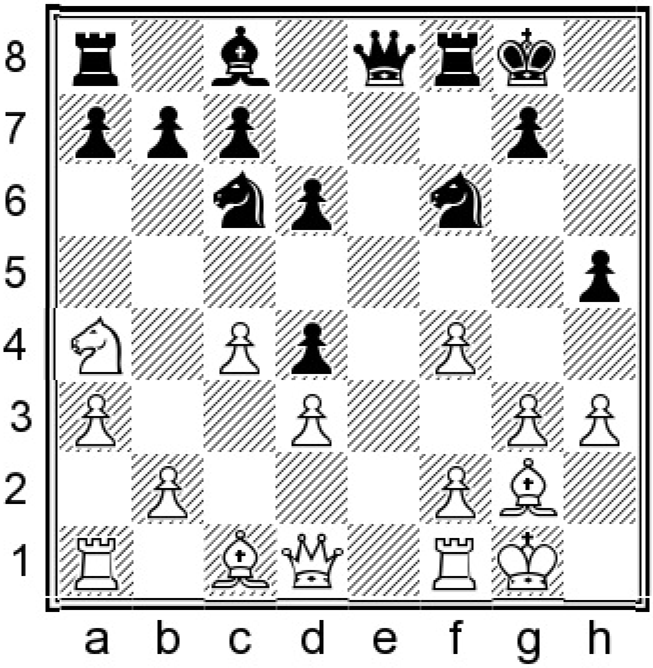
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

12...h5!

Preparing piece activity after preventing the possible g4 by White, an advance that would be defensive rather than aggressive.

13.a3



Exercise: What was Fischer’s fourth strong move in succession?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13...a5!

Fischer restrains white expansion on both wings and prepares to place his queen and bishop in ideal positions.

It’s notable that the currently strongest engines (in early 2021) suggest other moves instead of the Black’s last two “human” moves, i.e. they have an understandable logic, not based strictly on calculation.

14.b3

Seeking a way to bring the knight back into play.

14...♕g6 15.♘b2 ♗f5

Black is able to develop freely and has adequate compensation for the pawn, thanks to the passivity and poor coordination of the white pieces.

16.♕c2

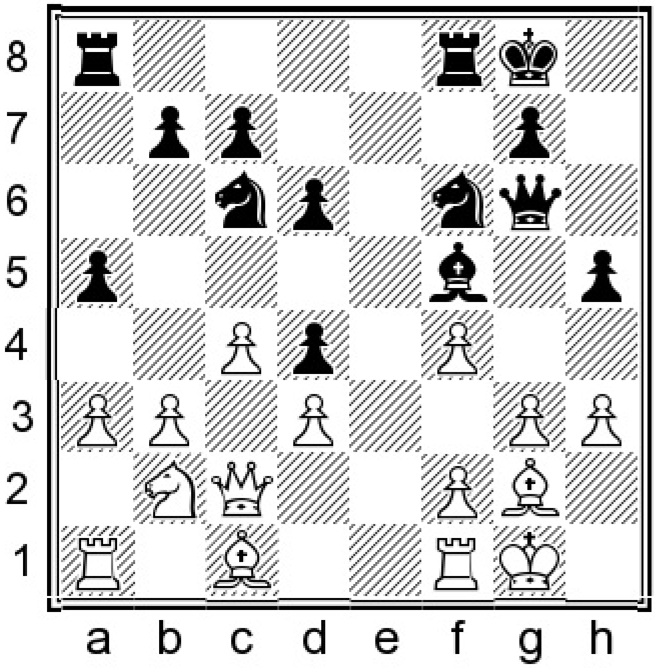
Defending d3 in order to be able to play 17.♗d2. “Too conservative,” wrote Nielsen.

Question: But this is hardly surprising, since it is consistent with the tone of White’s previous moves. What should he have played here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes, we can say that this was White’s “sin” in this game. He relied on his material advantage and thought that it was enough to keep playing simple moves, which was fine up to a point. But the resultant untypical position deserved or even demanded original measures at various moments, such as 8.fxe5! or 10.♗e3 earlier, but of course it was difficult to understand this at the time.

Nielsen suggested 16.♗d2 here, preparing to expand with b4 and returning the pawn to solve his problems of mobility and get rid of the passive knight.



Exercise: How did Fischer continue here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16...♘d7!

The start of several regroupings designed to optimise the activity of the black pieces; first the knight goes to c5 to increase the pressure on d3.

17.♖e1 ♘c5 18.♗f1

Exercise: How did Fischer proceed now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18...♖a6!

Another piece is activated; now the target is the pawn on b3; we saw Fischer execute a similar manoeuvre in Game 30 against Durão.

19.♗d2?

White finally develops his bishop, and ...his position worsens.

It was very difficult to play the engine's suggestion 19.♕d1, when 19...♖b6 can be parried with 20.♘a4!; but with the queen on c2 Black can answer ♘a4 with ...♘xd3!, regaining the pawn with a big advantage.

19...♖b6 20.♗xa5!?

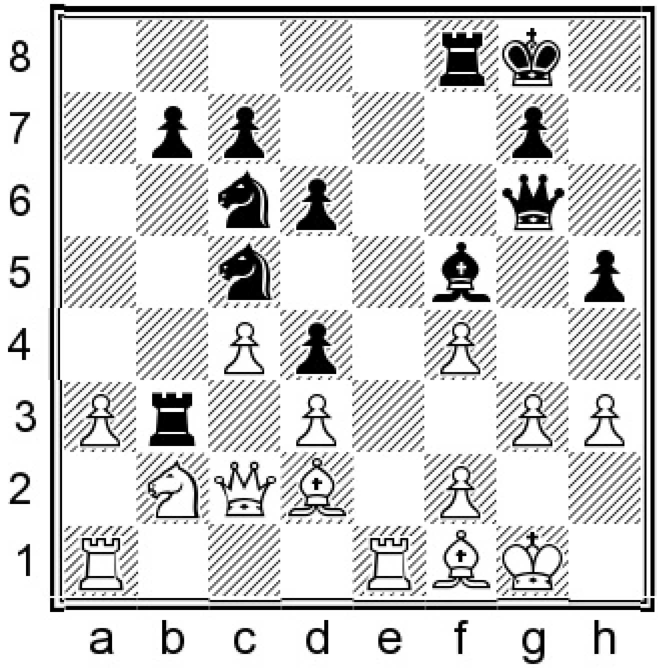
Finally White enters a tactical duel to try to release the pressure.

Returning the pawn with 20.b4 axb4 21.axb4 ♘xb4 22.♗xb4 ♖xb4, hoping for activity with 23.♖e7 would fail due, among other things, to 23...♘e6!, and there is no good defence against 24...♕f6 25.♖d7 ♘xf4, with a winning attack.

20...♖xb3!

Even better than 20...♘xa5 21.b4 ♘ab3 22.♖ad1; this way Black increases his activity.

21.♗d2



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

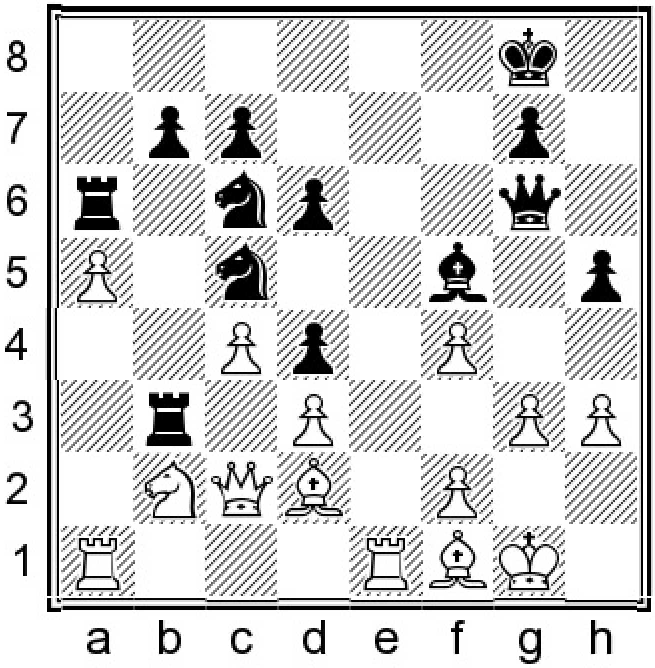
Answer:

21...♖a8!

The engines suggest the “unhuman” line 21...h4 22.g4 ♘e5, which seems good but requires a lot of calculation, which is hardly appropriate for a clock game.

Fischer is playing in the most “human” way; this rook contributes towards the pressure on the queenside and maintains Black’s advantage.

22.a4 ♖a6! 23.a5



Exercise: White has prevented 23...♖ab6; how did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23...♔h7!

An excellent preparatory move; the monarch avoids any future check on d5, or possibly on the back rank, which might become important in any tactical complications.

This type of move quiet “before the storm” is associated with Kasparov, or before him with Petrosian, but Fischer also deserves to be on this list.

Astonishingly, this exact position occurred again five years later, in Karpov - Bellón, Madrid 1973, where Black played 23...♘b4? 24.♗xb4 ♖xb4 and after these exchanges White had fewer problems.

24.♖ed1

Exercise: Following his previous preparatory move, how did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24...b6!

Opening more lines; the point is that 25.axb6? ♖axb6 26.♖a2 fails to the simple 26...♘xd3.

Instead, 26...h4 27.g4 ♗xg4! was also good, exploiting the tactical weakness of the rook on d1 after 28.hxg4 ♕xg4+ 29.♔h2 ♖xb2 30.♖xb2 ♖xb2 31.♕xb2 ♕xd1.

If White responds to 26...h4 with 27.♔h2, then 27...♘xd3 28.♘xd3 ♗xd3 29.♗xd3 hxg3+ 30.fxg3 ♖xd3 and Black's attack is very strong; the b6-rook will go to b3 and the c6-knight will head for f5.

The spectacular 27...♘e4! also works, e.g. 28.dxe4 hxg3+, with a winning attack.

That Black has more than one way to prevail is a measure of how bad White's position has become.

25.♗e1 bxa5

Regaining the pawn, with a big advantage.

26.♘a4

Exercise: There is more than one good move now; Fischer played the strongest - what is it?

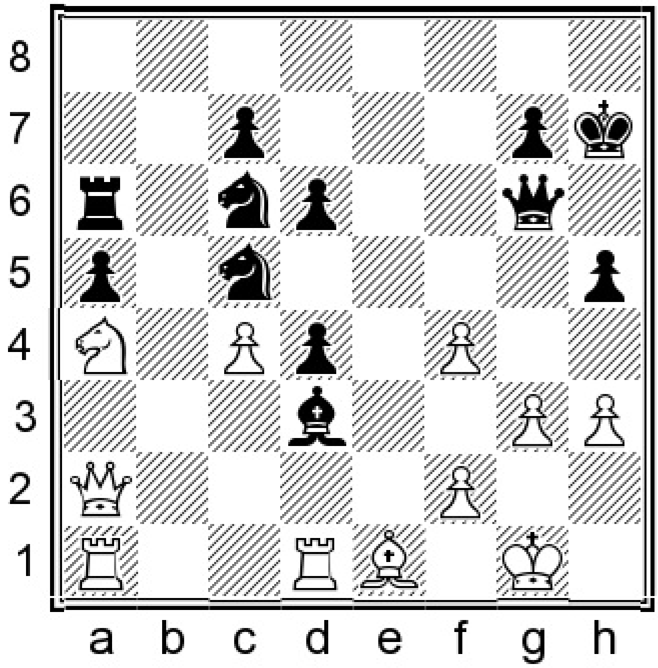
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

26...♖xd3!

This temporary exchange sacrifice is more crushing than the passive 26...♖b8; the threat is 27...♖xg3+.

27.♗xd3 ♗xd3 28.♕a2



Exercise: How did Fischer make further progress here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

28...♘b4!

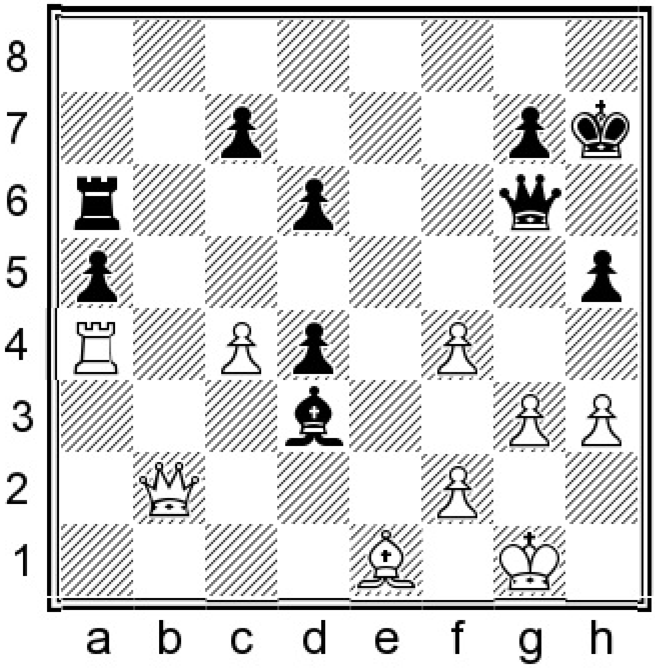
Now (see the note to Black's move 23) this is indeed strong; Black regains the exchange practically by force, because the knight can't be eliminated: after 29.♗xb4 axb4 the pin on the a-file is deadly.

29.♕a3

Equally futile is 29.♕b2 ♘c2 30.♘xc5 dxc5 31.♖xa5 (or 31.♖ac1 ♗e4) 31...♖e6 32.♗d2 ♕e4 and the weakness of the white king is decisive.

Finally, sacrificing the queen for the two rooks with 29.♘xc5 ♘xa2 30.♘xa6 hold out no hopes for White; after 30...♘c3 31.♗xc3 (or 31.♖d2 ♕e4 32.♘xc7 ♗b1!) 31...dxc3 32.♘xc7 c2 33.♖dc1 ♗xc4 the c2-pawn, the distant and exposed knight, together with the weakness of the white king, tip the balance overwhelmingly in Black's favour.

29...♘c2 30.♕b2 ♘xa1 31.♖xa1 ♘xa4 32.♖xa4



Exercise: What was the strong move that Fischer played here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

32...♕e4!

Activity! This move attacks the bishop and prepares 33...♖b6, which would be the response to 33.♕d2, for instance; there is also the idea of ...♕f3, followed by ...♗e4.

33.♗xa5

A blunder in time pressure, losing a piece, but for several moves now there has been no adequate defence.

33...♖xa5!

The fussy engines point out that 33...♕f3 was quicker.

34.♖xa5 ♕e1+ 35.♔h2 ♕xa5

And after playing...

36.♕xd4

Saidy resigned.

This was Fischer's last official game in the USA.

Hamann commented that decades later he spent a few days in Iceland, where he looked for Fischer's number in the phone book and (obviously) did not find it. "Too bad. He really owed me a cheese sandwich."

(back to the text) This sacrifice is quite usual with colours reversed, after 1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.f4 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.♗c4 e6 6.f5, but here White has the extra move d3.

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1970

The USSR – Rest of the World Match, Belgrade 1970

Game 42

“Two years that shook the world”

In 1969 Bobby completed his book “My 60 Memorable Games,” which included, on Larry Evans’s advice, 3 losses and 9 draws.

At the beginning of 1970, Fischer seemed lost to the world of chess, and of course, to this match due to take place in Belgrade.

Once again, people who realised what an enormous gap the absence of Fischer would leave made all kinds of arrangements, including taking on the complex task of persuading Fischer that he should play. The chief match arbiter, Bozidar Kasic, flew to the USA and convinced him that a Match of the Century without the presence of Bobby Fischer would be quite absurd.

Fischer flew to Belgrade, in fact, but there was still an obstacle in the way. Bent Larsen refused to play second board, for he considered, quite rightly, that Fischer had not played in anything of importance in the previous two years, while Larsen’s results had been excellent.

To everyone’s surprise, Fischer agreed to take board two and to play against Petrosian instead of Spassky.

In Belgrade Fischer was treated like a superstar of the silver screen. Every step he took, no matter how small, was reported at length in the local press. That interest, on behalf of the public as well as the media, interest would be maintained.

None the less, Fischer’s anxiety before playing was palpable, as Taimanov relates. Fischer arrived half an hour late to play his first game against Petrosian, “white as a sheet,” and he even hesitated before making his first move. After that, though, everything changed: his body language became once more that of the formidable fighter he was, and his tension was forgotten.

I recall that my chess teacher Bernardo Wexler (who once defeated the young Fischer) told me that in those days he believed that Fischer suffered badly from his nerves before a game and found the tension almost unbearable, but once he started to play this disappeared and he relished the struggle. This is borne out by what Taimanov said, and by Fischer’s already at that time frequent and later much worse reluctance to play; it’s a feeling that often seizes many chess players as they get older.

Fischer wrote a letter to his friend Walter Browne, in which he told him how nervous he felt, not having played for some time, but that when he saw Petrosian’s face he calmed down. “He looked scared!”.

Fischer won the first two games, playing very well, and went on to draw the last two, and to achieve the best individual result of the “Rest of the World” team, although the USSR won 20½ - 19½.

After the match Fischer played in Herceg Novig in what could be considered the unofficial world blitz championship. All the players from the Match of the Century took part and Fischer won with 19 points out of 22, finishing 4½ points (!) ahead of his friend Mikhail Tal.

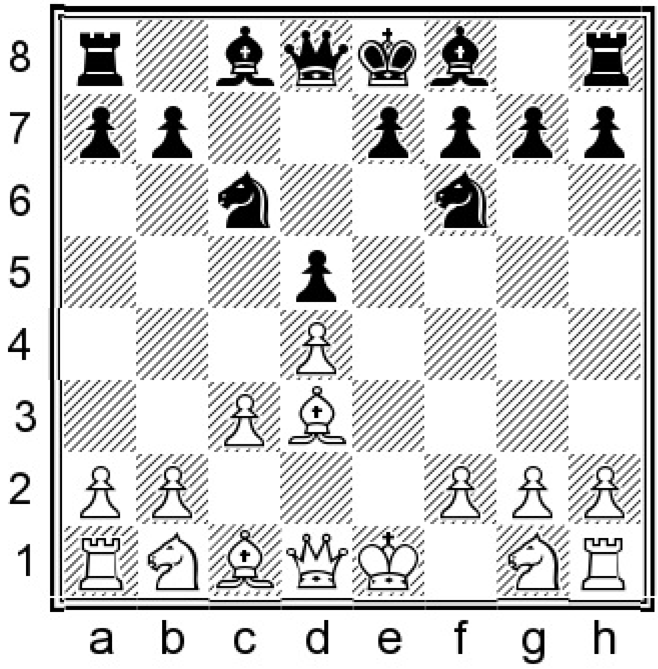
Robert Fischer
Tigran Petrosian
Caro-Kann Defence [B13]
USSR – Rest of the World, Belgrade (1), 29.03.1970

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 cxd5 4.♗d3

This old line was a surprising choice on Fischer’s part; in the third game he played 3.♘c3. After this game the exchange line became more popular and in the twenty-first century it is a frequent guest in top-level tournaments.

“More often seen is 4.c4. I played an old variation in order to avoid well-known variations,” according to Fischer, quoted in *Chess Meets of the Century*.

4...♘c6 5.c3 ♘f6



6.♗f4

Fischer commented that a 6.h3 preventing the development of the c8-bishop could be met with

6...e5!, while the continuation 6.♗g5 ♘e4! 7.♗xe4 dxe4 8.d5 ♘e5 9.♕a4+ ♕d7 10.♕xe4 ♕f5 is advantageous for Black, he added; and indeed after 11.♕xf5 ♗xf5 Black easily regains the pawn, remaining with the better development and the bishop pair.

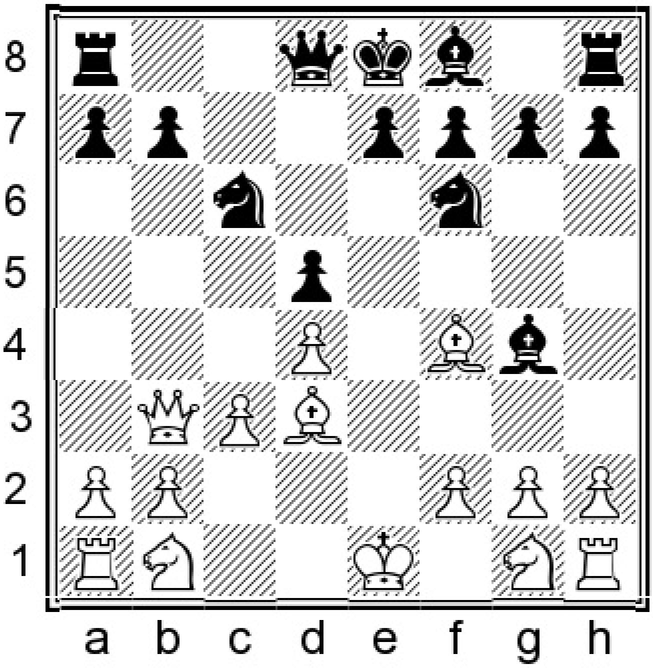
6...♗g4

The most natural procedure in the Caro-Kann is to develop this bishop outside the pawn chain, and after playing ...e6 we arrive at a "Carlsbad" structure, familiar with reversed colours from the Queen's Gambit.

Kasparov commented that in 1970s this line was studied intensively in Baku, where under the influence de Alexander Sakharov "everyone played the Caro-Kann Defence."

"The second possibility would be 6...g6," wrote Fischer, but subsequently this option was less popular.

7.♕b3



Trying to show the drawback of bringing the c8-bishop outside the pawn chain.

7...♘a5

"Hort's move 7...♕c8! is better, with the bishop manoeuvre ...♗h5–g6," wrote Fischer.

According to Kasparov, for his part Petrosian regretted not playing 7...♕b6, "in analogy with an old game against Kasparian, in Erevan 1946."

Analogy, certainly, because in that game Petrosian actually played 6...♕b6, one move earlier, and replied to 7.♕b3 with 7...g6; but he did play the queen to b6 on move 7 against Solmanis in Tiflis 1949.

7...♕d7 is another satisfactory continuation, where for some time the most common continuation was 8.♘d2 e6 9.♘gf3, and here 9...♗xf3 10.♘xf3 ♗d6 11.♗xd6 ♕xd6, "when he has no particular problems," according to Kasparov, who also played this line.

The latest fashion here is instead of 9...♗xf3 to play the immediate 9...♗d6, with the possible continuation 10.♗xd6 ♕xd6 11.0-0 (11.♕xb7 ♖b8 12.♕a6 0-0 13.♗b5 ♖b6 14.♕a4 ♘e7 isn't advantageous to White; Black has good compensation after 15.♘e5 ♘g6 16.♘xg4 ♘xg4 17.h3 ♘f6 18.♘b3 e5, as in Aronian - Caruana, Saint Louis 2018) 11...0-0 12.♖fe1 ♘e7 (12...♕c7 intending ...♗h5–g6 is also acceptable) 13.♘e5 ♗f5, Carlsen - Firouzja, Saint Louis, lichess.org INT 2020.

8.♕a4+ ♗d7

"But this timid, passive move, followed by the incarceration of the bishop by ...e6 is not at all in the spirit of the Caro-Kann!". (Kasparov).

8...♘c6 is correct, when in Kasparov's opinion the queen stands no better on a4 than on d1.

9.♕c2 e6

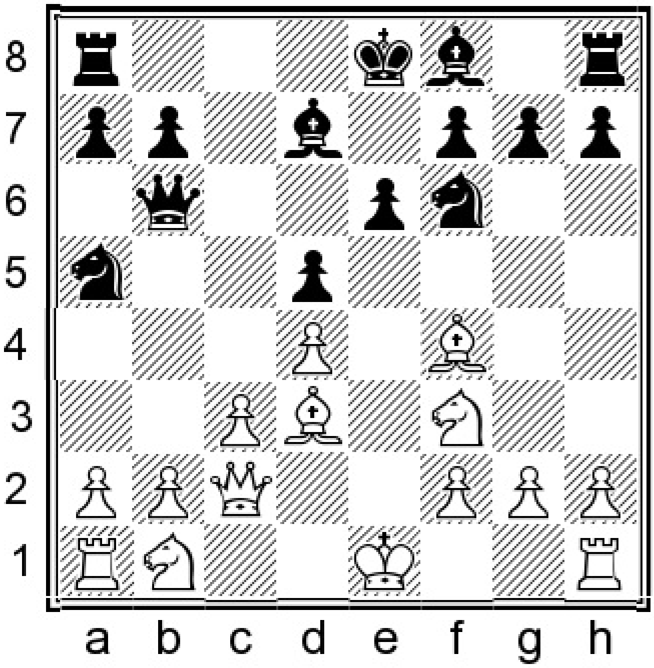
"After the game Petrosian recommended 9...a6," wrote Fischer.

Kasparov indicated that White should prevent the idea of ...♗b5 with 10.a4!, but then Black could return to the idea of 10...♗g4 11.♘d2 e6, and it isn't clear that this is bad for Black.

Perhaps the simple 10.♘f3 would be better, when 10...♗b5 would be dubious due to 11.♗xb5 axb5 12.a4!, and then if 12...♘c6 13.♘a3! is good (13...bxa4? loses to 14.♘b5).

10.♘f3 ♕b6

Petrosian continues down a known line; the natural alternative is 10...♗e7, followed by 11...0-0.



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

11.a4!

"Preventing 11...♗b5, with which Black would solve the problem of his bishop. With this move White gets a clear advantage as he has overturned Black's strategy." (Fischer).

The bishop exchange was allowed by Maroczy against Capablanca in Lake Hopatcong 1926, where he played 11.0-0?! and Black achieved good play.

Fischer didn't consider the weakness at b3 worrying. "A typically Fischer-like, very concrete move: abstract fears about the weakness of the b3-square are unknown to the American!," wrote Kasparov, and he thought that Petrosian underestimated this move.

11...♖c8

"If 11...♘b3 12.♖a2 ♖c8 13.0-0 ♗e7 White would have difficulties to push back Black's position [sic], but his bishops would be immobile," commented Fischer; in Informator 9 he indicated that White has a clear advantage.

White could simply play ♘bd2, exchanging the invader, or continue with ♕d1 and ♗c2, para expel it.

"If 11...♕b3 12.♕e2 ♗xa4? 13.♖xa4 ♕xa4 14.♗b5+," (Fischer in Informator).

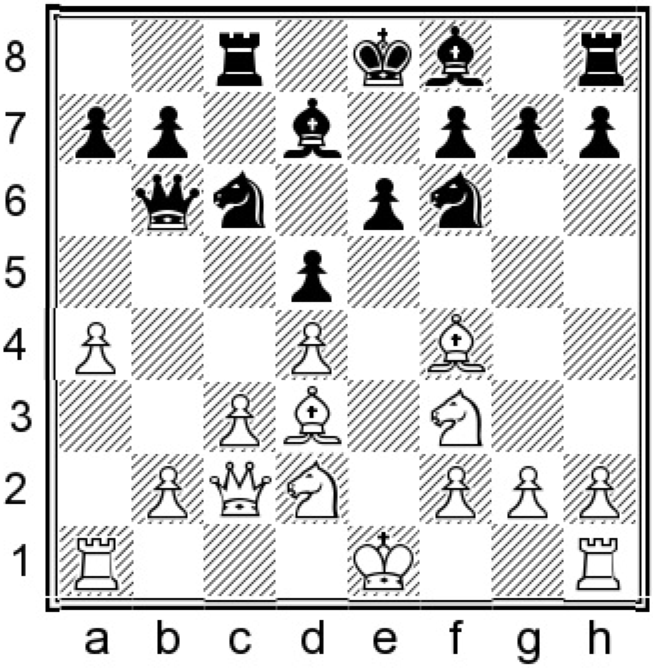
Question: Instead of capturing on a4, wouldn’t 12...♘c4 be better?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes, but after 13.♗c1 the black pieces have achieved nothing special with their fleeting initiative; White would be threatening 14.a5, followed by 15.♘bd2, and the black queen would be in danger.

In the absence of anything better, White could also continue with 14.0-0, with the better position.

12.♘bd2 ♘c6



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13.♕b1!

Preventing the threat of 13...♘b4; Fischer didn’t comment on this move.

13...♘h5?!

"Losing time; better was 13...g6," according to Fischer.

"It is clear that Black has lost the opening battle and the bishop at d7 is no adornment to his position." (Kasparov).

It's curious that the current engines (at the start of 2021) propose this move and still see no problems for Black.

After 13...g6 14.0-0 Black could play 14...♘h5, keeping the bishop out of d6, followed by ...♗g7. Nevertheless, the white position would still be slightly better; he could continue with the same plan as in the game, although of course not under such favourable conditions.

14.♗e3 h6?!

This is not the best recipe to defend the h7-pawn; it is very passive; we're already in a position which requires concrete solutions.

If 14...f5 Fischer indicated that he would open the position immediately with 15.g4! fxg4 16.♘g5 ♗d6 17.♗xh7.

Other recommendation included 14...g6 and 14...♗d6 (Suetin), in which case the complications after 15.♗xh7 g6 16.♗xg6 fxg6 17.♕xg6+ ♔d8 favour Black, according to the current engines.

It's likely that Fischer would have continued as in the game, after both 14...g6 and 14...♗d6.

Kasparov recommended 14...♕c7, sacrificing a pawn but controlling e5, with a reasonable position after 15.♗xh7 ♘f4 16.♗xf4 ♕xf4 17.♗d3 ♗d6. This suggestion is possibly best, "but this would have been in the style of Spassky or Tal, and not at all Petrosian!" (Kasparov).

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

15.♘e5

Of course, occupying e5; the harmony of White's game contrasts with the poor coordination of the black forces.

15...♘f6

"Effectively capitulation," wrote Petrosian, adding: "When I played 11...♖c8, I was intending in this position 15...♘xe5 16.dxe5 ♗c5 with the exchange of bishops and ...♘f4, which in combination with a possible ...f7-f6 or ...d5-d4 would have given Black a good game. And only at the very last moment did I see that the intermediate move 17.a5! would disrupt all my plans: 17...♕c7 18.g4!, and wins a piece, for which after 18...♗xe3 19.fxe3 ♕xe5 20.gxh5 ♕xe3+ 21.♗e2 ♗b5 22.♕d1 followed by 23.♘f1, and Black no has real compensation.”

If 17...♕c7 Fischer himself indicated the less complex 18.♘f3, “and White has the advantage.” Kasparov approved of this idea; after 18...♗xe3 19.fxe3 Black is forced to play 19...f5, weakening the kingside and remaining with the knight misplaced on h5.

This is possibly the line that Fischer would have chosen, as it’s typical of his play. He tended to prefer to have an advantage in a simple position rather than a possibly greater advantage but involving unnecessary complications.

Exercise: How did Fischer proceed now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16.h3

“Defending against ...♘g4 and preparing g2-g4 if Black castles.” (Fischer).

“White has a solid centre and very powerful pressure – in a word, a strategically won position.” (Kasparov).

16...♗d6 17.0-0 ♔f8?

It’s easy to suggest 17...0-0, which is better, “but after 18.f4 I did not see what could be done to counter the attack with g2-g4.” (Petrosian).

Exercise (simple): What did Fischer play now?

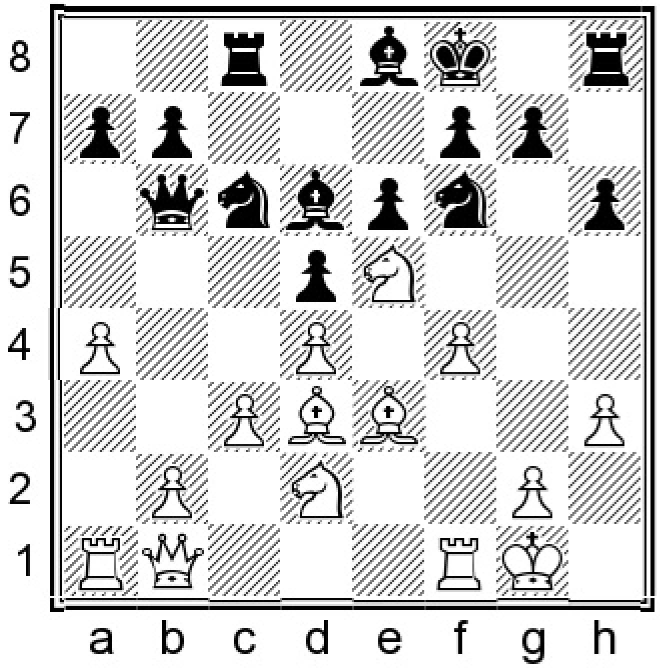
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18.f4

Of course, he bolsters his centralised knight, and now if 18...♘xe5? 19.fxe5 ♗xe5 then White has 20.a5, and wins, as Fischer indicated.

18...♗e8



Exercise: How did Fischer take another step forward?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19.♗f2!

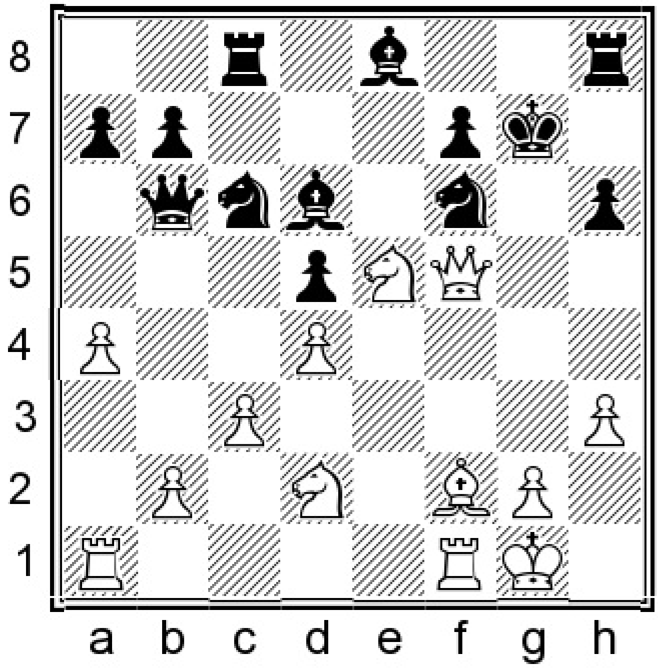
An unexpected waiting move (it doesn't feature among the top choices of the current engines), which, with the bishop on f2 now defended, prepares f5; the bishop can also go to h4 at a suitable moment.

19...♕c7

Against 19...g6 Kasparov analysed in depth the sacrifice 20.♗xg6 fxg6 21.♘xg6+, reaching the conclusion that White's attack is advantageous, but in fact 21...♔g7 seems to hold e.g. 22.♘xh8 ♔xh8 23.f5 ♔h7!, to be able to reply to 24.fxe6+ (or 24.♗h4 ♘xd4!) with 24...♗g6.

Instead, Fischer gave "20.f5! gxf5 21.♗xf5 exf5 22.♕xf5 ♕d8 23.♗h4, with a winning position."

Instead of 22...♕d8, Kasparov indicated the defence 22...♔g7, which the engines of now more than ten years ago considered strong, but the current engines have a different view.



Exercise (very difficult): How do you think Fischer would have continued here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Not with 23.♕xc8?, since 23...♘e7! 24.♕a8 ♗d7 leaves White with nothing.

The apparently strong 23.♗h4? fails to 23...♗xe5 24.♗xf6+ ♗xf6 25.♕xf6+ ♔g8, and now it looks crushing to bring the rook into the attack with 26.♖f4, after 26...♖h7 27.♖g4+ ♔f8 28.♕f5, attacking both rooks, Black has 28...h5! 29.♖f4 (or 29.♖h4 ♕d8!) 29...♕c7!, and the queen defends the c8-rook, simultaneously attacking the white rook on f4, and preserving the material advantage.

If, instead of 26.♖f4, White plays 26.♖f3, the continuation could be 26...♖h7 27.♖g3+ ♔f8 28.♕f5, but once again Black has 28...♕c7!, attacking the rook on g3 and defending one of the rooks.

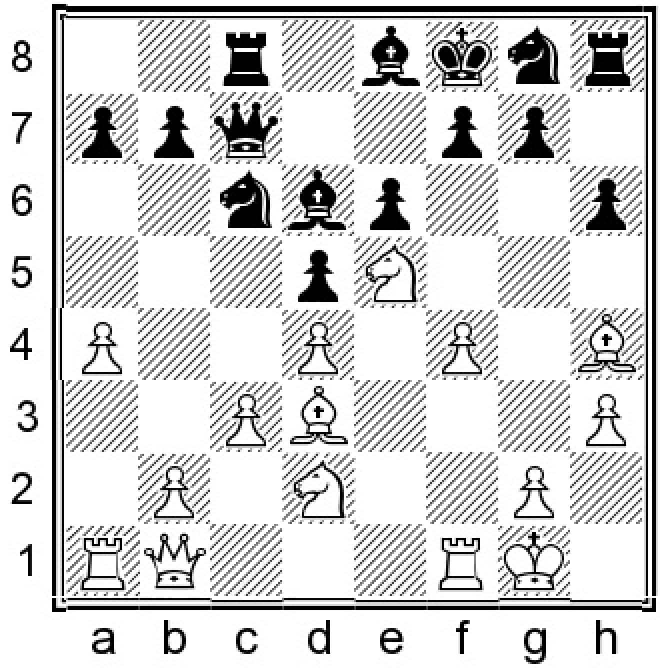
Also fruitless is 23.♘dc4? dxc4 24.♘xc4, because, thanks to having two extra pieces, Black can hold with 24...♘e7!, and after 25.♘xb6 ♘xf5 26.♘xc8 ♗b8 it is White who must struggle to keep the balance.

Nevertheless, the beautiful and surprising 23.♘ec4!! decides the struggle, e.g. 23...dxc4 24.♗h4! ♘d7 25.♘xc4 ♕c7 26.♗f6+! ♘xf6 27.♕xf6+ ♔h7 28.♘xd6 threatening both 29.♕f5+ and 29.♘f5, and Black is unable to defend everything.

Naturally after 24.♗h4 (as after 23.♗h4?) it is also possible to play 24...♗e5, but White would be only a piece down and would bring all his pieces into the attack after 25.♗xf6+ ♗xf6 26.♕xf6+ ♔g8, e.g. with 27.♖f4 h5 28.♖f5 ♖h7 29.♘e4, followed by ♖e1, and Black completely lacks coordination and has no good defence.

20.♗h4 ♘g8

“Black has a passive position. With his last move he hopes to mobilise his pieces to the kingside.” (Fischer).



Exercise (simple): How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21.f5!

Of course, the king on f8 is a very great weakness for Black, which can be exploited by opening lines; and here this is not even a pawn sacrifice.

21...♘xe5 22.dxe5 ♗xe5 23.fxe6 ♗f6 24.exf7 ♗xf7

Exercise: White has achieved his aim of opening up the position of the black monarch; how did he continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

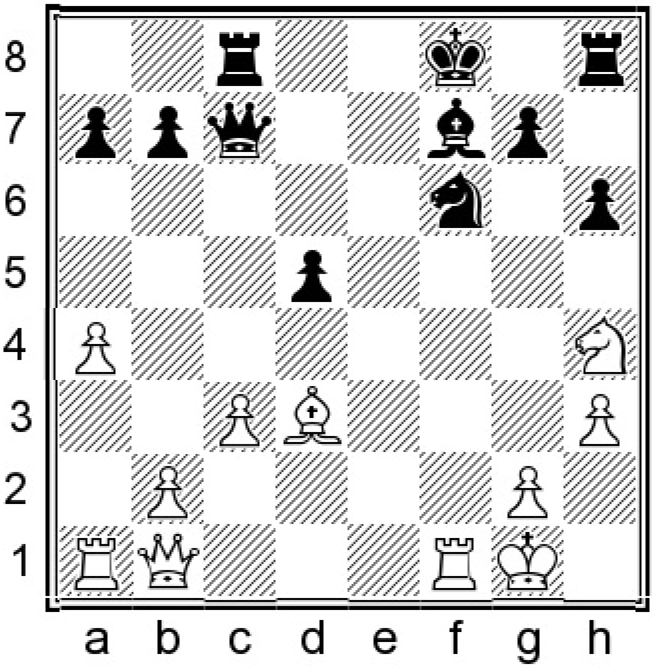
25.♘f3!

A new piece joins in the attack.

25...♗xh4

If 25...g5 26.♗f2 ♔g7 then 27.♗d4 (Fischer) or 27.♘d4 Kasparov), and the weakened black position is indefensible.

26.♘xh4 ♘f6



Exercise: There are several good moves here; Fischer made a move which, in Kasparov’s opinion, is typical of his style. What do you think it was?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

27.♘g6+!

“ A characteristic touch. (...) Bobby does not miss a chance to exchange the enemy bishop (he valued this piece very highly) and remain with his favourite light-squared bishop against a knight.” (Kasparov).

As evidence of the size of White’s advantage it is notable that the engines prefer the quiet 27.♕c2, to bring the a1-rook into the attack.

27...♗xg6 28.♗xg6 ♔e7!

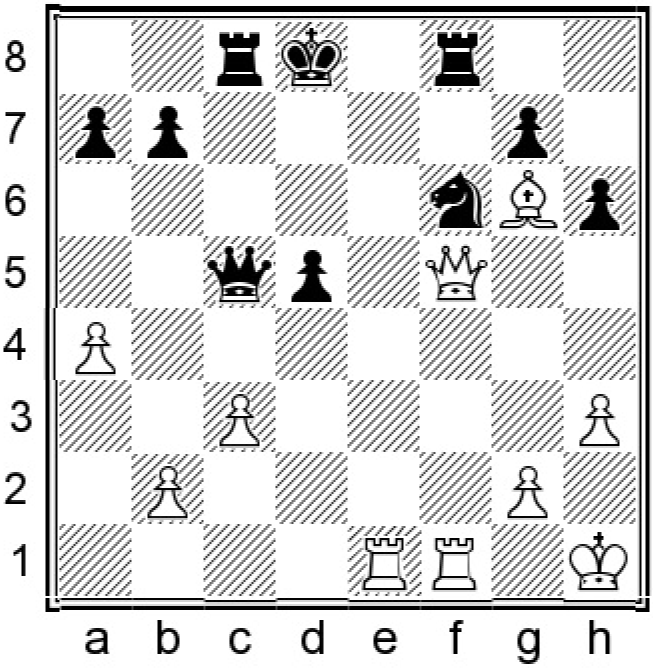
“In this position, where I expected Petrosian to resign, he finds an ingenious defence, trying to escape with his king to the queenside,” wrote Fischer, who was the one who awarded the exclamation mark to the move.

“Black’s only chance,” was Petrosian’s comment.

29.♕f5 ♔d8 30.♖ae1 ♕c5+ 31.♔h1 ♖f8

Both players considered that 31...♖c6 was better, but after the possible continuation 32.♗f7 ♖d6 (32...♖c7 33.♗e6) 33.c4! “Black would not have lasted long.” (Kasparov).

Instead of 32.♗f7, the current engines prefer 32.b4 ♕xc3 33.b5 ♖c7 34.♕e6, although they come to the same conclusion.



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

32.♕e5!

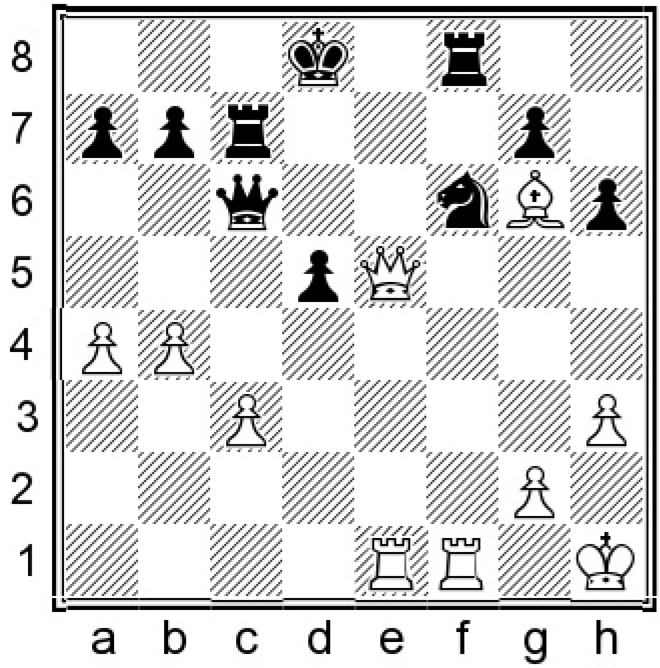
With this powerful centralisation, any vestige of resistance is terminated; White threatens 33.b4, among other things.

32...♖c7

If 32...♕c7 the strongest and prettiest finish is 33.♕xd5+! ♘xd5 34.♖xf8+ ♔d7 35.♗f5+ ♔d6 36.♖xc8, followed by 37.♖e6+.

33.b4! ♕c6

Black has to keep control of the d6-square; if 33...♕e7 then 34.♕d4 and 35.♕xa7.



Exercise: How did Fischer strike an almost decisive blow now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

34.c4!

Opening the d-file as well.

“This is a pretty and energetic conclusion.” (Kasparov).

34...dxc4 35.♗f5 ♖ff7 36.♖d1+ ♖fd7

Or 36...♘d7 37.♖fe1.

37.♗xd7 ♖xd7 38.♕b8+ ♔e7

Or 38...♕c8 39.♖xd7+ ♘xd7 40.♕d6 wins (Fischer).

39.♖de1+

39...♔f7 40.♕e8++ would follow.

1–0

This game won the prize for the best game of the first round.

Game 43

Forty-three requests granted

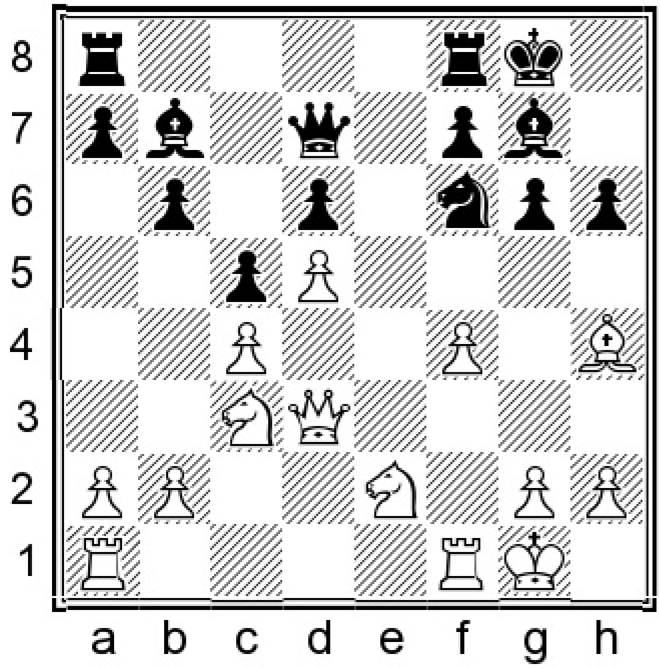
After the Belgrade Tournament, a tournament took place in Zagreb to which Fischer was invited, and Fischer accepted, although before setting off he told David Bronstein that if the lighting was not good enough he would withdraw, apparently having little faith in his requirements being met. However, the organisers agreed to all his demands (43 of them!), and so Fischer was "obliged" to play, which he did brilliantly, scoring 13 points out of 17, and he finished 2 points ahead of Gligorić, Hort, Korchnoi and Smyslov.

As Kasparov said, "It is with the 'Match of the Century' and the tournament in Zagreb, that the real Fischer legend essentially begins."

It is possible that without that visit from Bozidar Kasic, to persuade him to play in Belgrade, none of this, nor any of what followed, would have happened.

Theodor Ghitescu
Robert Fischer
King's Indian Defence [E82]
Rovinj/Zagreb, Zagreb (7), 20.04.1970

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.f3 0-0 6.♗e3 b6 7.♗d3 ♗b7 8.♘ge2 c5 9.d5 e6 10.0-0 exd5 11.exd5 ♘bd7 12.♗g5 h6 13.♗h4 ♘e5 14.f4 ♘xd3 15.♕xd3 ♕d7



White to play

Fischer has played his favourite King’s Indian, but has ended up with a passive bishop on b7 which needs to be redeployed.

White now executed a good manoeuvre to try to profit from his greater mobility.

16.♗xf6!

A good exchange, eliminating a kingside defender and dispensing with a piece which, if White played an immediate 16.f5, would have little future after 16...g5, after which Black could, at an opportune moment, occupy the e5-square with his knight under favourable conditions.

16...♗xf6 17.f5!

Exercise (simple): White completes his manoeuvre; how did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17...g5

Practically forced; of course 17...gxf5? is just as bad as it looks; 18.♘g3 would follow, which is even better than 18.♖xf5.

17...♔g7? is also bad, in view of 18.fxg6 followed by ♘f4; both recaptures seriously weaken

Black’s king position.

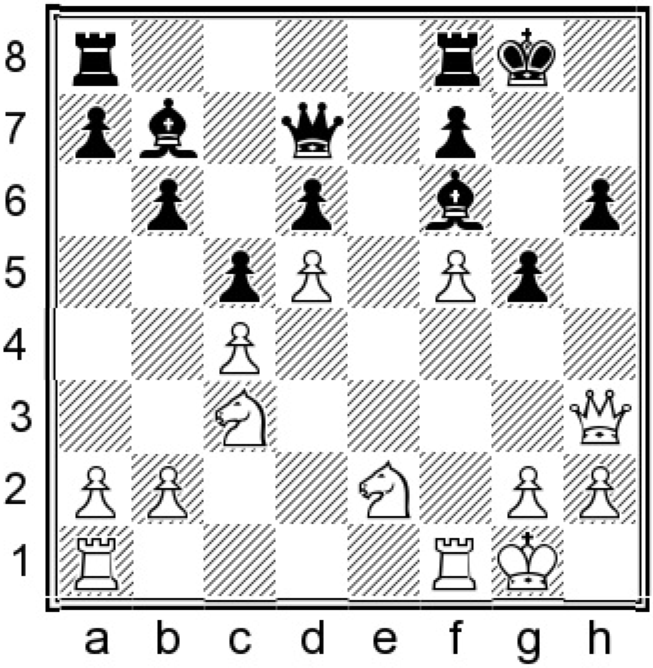
18.♕h3

White has the advantage; here he had two good options to consider, and it’s difficult to determine which is the stronger.

18.♘e4 is attractive; it would obviously be dangerous to play 18...♗xb2 due to 19.♘2c3!, and after 19...f6 20.♖ab1 ♗xc3 21.♕xc3 ♔g7 22.♕g3, attacking d6, and with the idea of h4, White has more than enough compensation for the pawn.

It would be preferable to play 18...♗e5, and on 19.f6 bring the queen to the defence with 19...♕g4.

Another attractive possibility was 18.♘g3 ♗d4+ 19.♔h1 f6 (19...♖ae8? allows 20.f6) 20.♖ae1 ♗e5, which also favours White.



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18...♗e5!

Once again forced, as 18...♔g7? would allow the black king to be harassed by White’s strong knights, possibly beginning with 19.♔h1, e.g., 19...♖ae8 (not 19...♗e5?? 20.f6+) 20.♘g3 ♔h7 21.♘ce4 ♕d8 22.♘f2! ♗c8 23.♘g4 ♗g7, and now there is a choice between several attractive possibilities, such as 24.f6, 24.♘h5 and 24.♕h5.

19.♕xh6 f6 20.♖f3

On 20.h4 it would be ideal to be able to play 20...♖f7, so that after 21.hxg5? ♖h7 22.♕g6+ ♖g7 23.♕h5 ♖xg5 Black could counterattack with good prospects; but the intermediate move 21.♘e4! prevents this, and after 21...♖af8 22.hxg5 ♖h7 23.♕g6+ ♖g7 24.♕h5 White has won an extra pawn without compensation and the black king remains weak.

It would be necessary to play 20...♕g7 and after 21.♕xg7+ ♔xg7 22.hxg5 fxg5 23.♖ae1 ♖ae8, with the idea of ...♗c8, Black would still be in the game.

Question: It's a bit sad to exchange queens when you're a pawn down. Is this really the best Black can do?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: It's a question of priorities; it's essential to deal with the most serious and immediate danger first, which is White's threat to exploit the weakness of the black king. You can't always play in an ideal way; for now it's necessary to hang on and seek compensation for the pawn deficit in the ending, by opening the game favourably.

Exercise: Let's get back to the game; after 20.♖f3, how did Fischer defend?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20...♕h7

As we saw earlier, the exchange of queens dissipates the danger to the king. It's better to exchange the queens rather than two major pieces: in the event of 20...♖f7 there might follow 21.♖h3 ♖h7 22.♕xh7+ ♕xh7 23.♖xh7 ♔xh7 24.♖f1, and White has managed to coordinate his pieces, in an advantageous situation in comparison with the game, as we shall see.

21.♕xh7+ ♔xh7 22.h4

A reasonable move but not the best, which was possibly 22.a4!, not fearing 22...g4 due to 23.♖f4!, given that if Black grabs the exchange a white knight on e6 will be more than enough compensation, while if 23...♖g8 then 24.♖e4 and White stands well; from e4 the rook attacks g4 and defends c4.

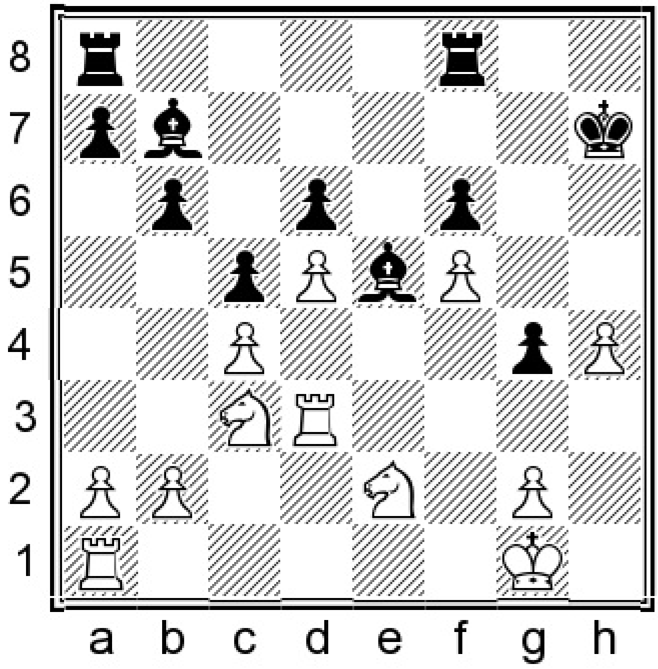
On the other hand 22.h3 is less precise; 22...♗a6 23.b3 b5 might follow.

22...g4

Of course not 22...gxh4? 23.♖h3, but here too 22...♗a6! was to be considered, and if 23.b3 b5; it would be worse for White to interpolate 23.hxg5?! fxg5 24.b3 due to 24...g4, and if 25.♖ff1 then ...♗c8.

23.♖d3

The extra pawn provides White with a margin for error. This isn't the most precise move; once again 23.♖f4! was preferable.



Exercise: What did Fischer play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23...♖ae8

Bringing the rook to the centre, with the idea of activating his misplaced bishop with ...♗c8.

This is not the right moment for implementing the ...b5 idea with 23...♗a6, since after 24.b3 b5? White can play 25.cxb5 ♗xb5 26.♘xb5! And after 26...♗xa1 27.♘xd6 ♗e5 28.♘c4 is good, but even better is 28.♘b7!, followed by d6.

Question: But if it's a question of playing ...b5, why not play 23...a6?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: It’s not just a question of playing ...b5, it needs to be done in a way that activates the pieces.

In response to 23...a6 the natural 24.a4?! isn’t very effective, as after 24...♗c8 25.♖f1 ♗d7 26.b3 Black can play 26...b5! in favourable circumstances, opening the play para his bishops and his rooks. But 24.♖f1 b5 25.b3 is better, and Black has achieved almost nothing.

24.♘g3?

After this error Black is no longer worse; it was better to play 24.♖f1, evading the ‘X-ray’ pressure coming from the bishop on e5.

Exercise (simple): What did Fischer play here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24...♗a6!

Of course, now this is good.

25.b3

Exercise (simple): And now?

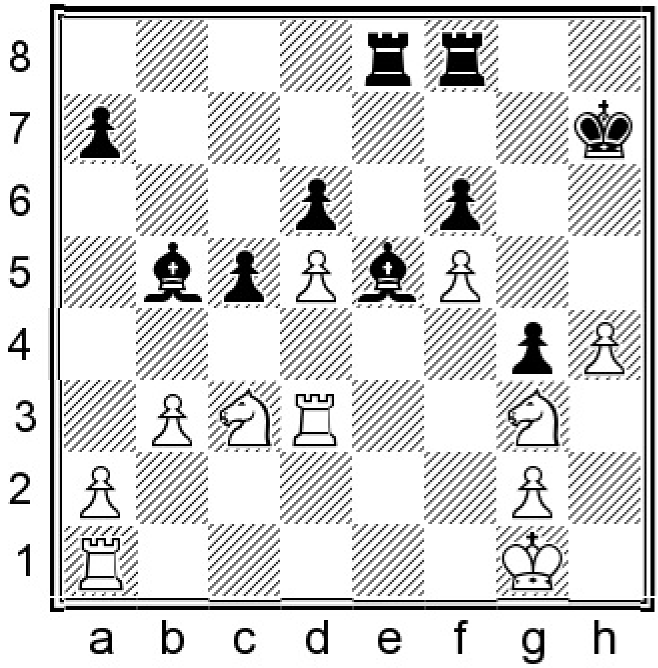
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

25...b5!

And White is forced to open up the game.

26.cxb5 ♗xb5



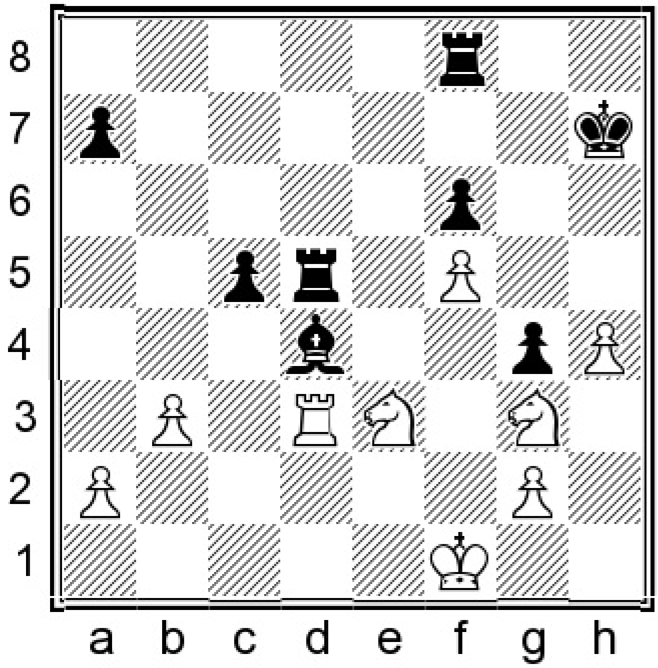
27.♘xb5!

This exchange sacrifice is forced; 27.♖e3? ♗d4 would be worse.

27...♗xa1 28.♘xd6 ♗d4+

Black improves the bishop "for free" and isolates the pawn on d5, because 29.♖xd4? cxd4 30.♘xe8 ♖xe8 is good for Black; the white king is unable to help in stopping Black's d-pawn.

29.♔f1 ♖e5 30.♘c4 ♖xd5 31.♘e3



31...♖d7

A logical move; the f8-rook defends f6 and this one goes to g7 after White captures on g4. Nevertheless it's not clear that this is the strongest move, and there are some alternatives.

One other possibility was 31...♖d6 32.♘xg4 ♖a6, while the surprising 31...♖dd8, was also to be considered, based on the fact that after 32.♘xg4 ♖g8, the move 33.♘f2? Loses to 33...♗xf2 34.♖xd8 (with the rook on d8 instead of d7, this capture isn't with check) 34...♗xg3; instead of 33.♘f2, 33.♖xd4 is necessary, and after e.g. 33...cxd4 34.♘xf6+ ♔h6 35.♘xg8+ ♖xg8, Black has practical chances, as indeed he also has with the other two possibilities.

32.♘xg4 ♖g7 33.♘f2 ♖fg8 34.♘fe4?!

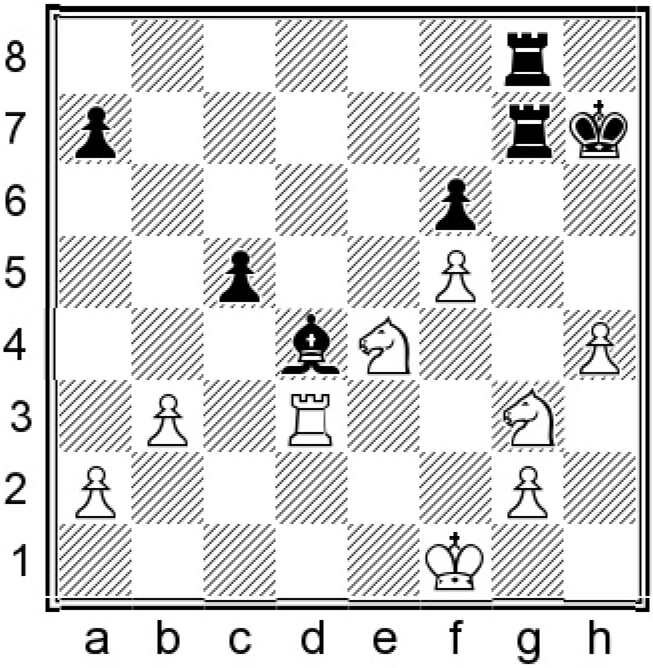
Material is now almost equal. Black's chances are slightly better, especially in a practical sense. On some moves White has several options which are apparently of similar worth and he simply he needs to choose one, the one which intuitively seems best, but at the same time he needs to be alert, in case at some point some other move offers better chances objectively.

Instead of the move played, White could have chosen 34.♘h5 or 34.♘ge4, and it wasn't easy to know which was best.

After 34.♘h5 Black could play e.g. 34...♖xg2 35.♖xd4 cxd4 36.♘xf6+ ♔h6 37.♘xg8+ ♖xg8 38.♔e2 ♖g3, which seems no better than the game continuation; this slightly uncomfortable, but apparently tenable, situation, can be reached on various ways.

But the play after 34.♘ge4! has its own distinctive character: if 34...♖xg2 White can counterattack with 35.b4!, e.g. 35...♖g1+ 36.♔e2 ♗xf2?! (possibly Black should try 36...♖8g2) 37.♘xf6+ ♔g7 (37...♔h8?! 38.♘xg8 ♗xh4 39.♖h3 is worse) 38.♘xg8 ♗xh4 39.bxc5 ♔xg8 40.c6, threatening c7, followed by 41.♖a3, and after capturing the pawn on a7 White reaches a theoretically drawn ending.

There are other lines, but at this point it seems that 34.♘ge4 possibly offered the best drawing chances.



Exercise: How did Fischer improve his practical chances now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

34...♔h6!

White will no longer be able to capture on f6 with check and White must work out how to withstand the pressure.

35.h5?

And finally White collapses, unable to withstand the pressure.

Instead 35.♘e2 was almost forced, 35...♖xg2?! would be ineffective due to 36.♘xd4 cxd4 37.♘xf6, which "offers much better drawing chances as more pieces are exchanged," (Karsten Müller, e.g. 37...♖8g3 38.♖xg3 (not 38.♖xd4? ♖xa2, followed by ...♖xb3 or ...♖c3) 38...♖xg3 39.♔e2 and there is little material left.

Black would possibly have preferred to keep the pressure with 35...♖e7 36.♘xd4 ♖xe4; the alternative 36.♘d2?! ♖e5 37.♘f3 ♖xf5 38.♘xd4 ♖d5 would be worse for White.

35...♖g4!

White's mobility is now much reduced.

36.♔e2

The g3-knight can't move and now 36.b4? isn't possible due to 36...♗e5!, followed by 37...cxb4.

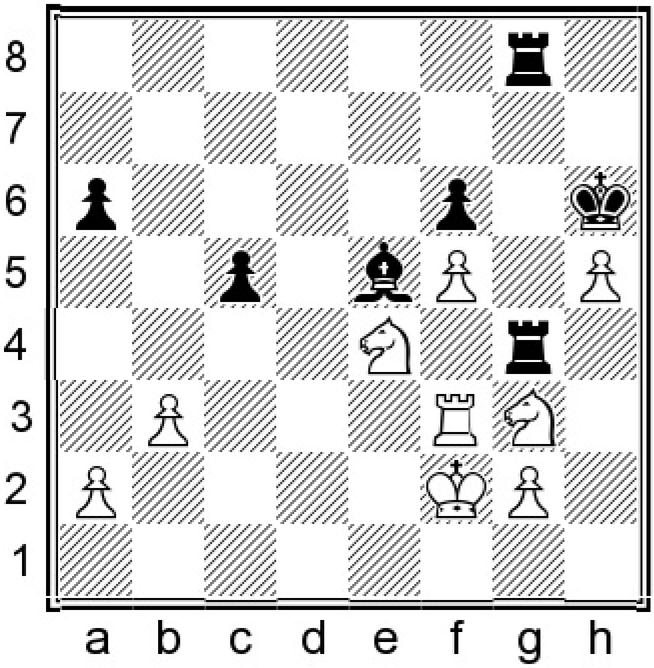
36...♗e5 37.♔f2 ♖4g7 38.♖f3 ♖g4 39.♖d3

After a repetition of moves to get closer to the time control Fischer now makes a modest pawn move.

39...a6

It's curious that this waiting move is also the preference of the engines.

40.♖f3 ♗d4+ 41.♔f1 ♗e5 42.♔f2



Black has reached the time control; normally the game would be adjourned after move 40, but Fischer played on for a while.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

42...a5!

On its own, the pressure along the g-file is not going to be enough to win; it's necessary to open lines so that rooks can infiltrate.

43.a4

If White waits, with 43.♖d3 for instance, this allows 43...a4! when after 44.♖f3 axb3 45.axb3 ♖a8 his position deteriorates rapidly and in fact there is no defence, e.g. 46.♖d3 ♖a2+ 47.♔f1 ♖a3! 48.♔e2 c4! 49.bxc4 ♖xd3 and wins.

In this line 44.bxa4 would be less tenacious, due 44...c4 45.♖e3 ♗xg3+ 46.♘xg3 ♖xg3!, and after taking twice on g3 the white king is unable to stop the c-pawn.

43...♖d8

Also good was 43...♖b8, but Fischer prefers to occupy the d-file d, ...♖d4 and ...c4 on the agenda, if nothing better crops up.

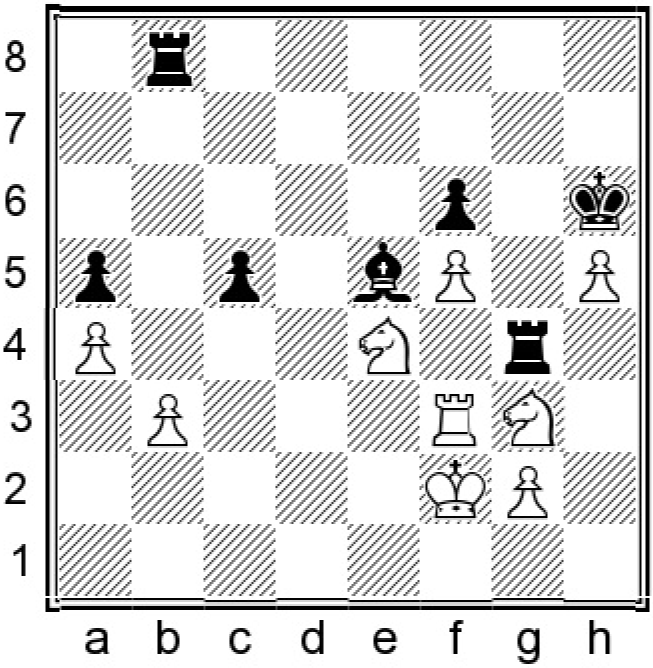
44.♔e3

On 44.♔e2 Black would have played 44...♖d4 45.♖e3 c4, followed by capturing the a4-pawn.

44...♖b8

Now Fischer occupies the b-file with a gain of time and in more favourable circumstances than after 43...♖b8.

45.♔f2



Exercise: How did Fischer strike the decisive blow?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

45...c4!

The invasion by the b8-rook terminates the struggle.

46.bxc4 ♖b2+ 47.♔f1

47.♔e3 ♖b4 would be similar; the white pieces are all tied up, added to which Black will soon create a passed pawn, e.g. 48.c5 ♖xa4 49.♔d3? Black cuts short White's suffering with 49...♗xg3 50.♘xg3 ♖a3+ 51.♔e2 ♖xg3.

47...♖b4

0–1

Game 44

Buenos Aires 1970

In July 1970, 10 years after his disastrous "Five-hundredth Anniversary Tournament" in Buenos Aires, Fischer returned to one of his favourite cities.

His reappearance was a return match with a dazzling result; he scored 15 out of 17 possible points, and finished 3½ points ahead of his pursuer, the Russian Vladimir Tukmakov.

Maybe this fantastic result had some influence on his desire to return to the battle for the World Championship, and to play in the Interzonal which was due to take place in Palma de Mallorca in November of that year (although the matter of his not having qualified remained to be solved). And that explained his presence, in September, at the Siegen Olympiad, in Germany, even though the organisers had only agreed to one of his twenty-five demands: that his board should be placed one metre further away from the front row of spectators.

I had the good fortune to be able to watch several rounds of this tournament. Unfortunately my very poor understanding of chess at that time meant that I was unable to learn much from it, although I was indeed fascinated to watch this top-level tournament and happy to have seen Fischer play.

Even luckier were some other youngsters of my age who worked as demonstration board operators or assistants to the tournament arbiters. In the 1970s there was no internet transmission or anything like it; in order to watch the games you had to be present in the playing hall. In important tournaments there were huge demonstration boards, on which the moves were manually reproduced; someone wrote the moves down on a score sheet and they were passed to the demonstration board operators.

Sitting at Fischer's table was a young man called Daniel Green (my friend and chess rival in the years of our youth, who has been living in the USA for many years now). within a few days he became friendly with Fischer, regardless of the 10 years difference in their ages.

On one of the first days Fischer asked Green where he could go to eat in the evening, and Green recommended one of the modest places that he and other chess players used to frequent, the popular and in those days very modest "Pipo" restaurant, which was very close to the Teatro General San Martín where the tournament was being held.

Green went to the Club Argentino and later he went to out to dine with "The Nuisance" Alisiewicz and "The Bear" Paglilla, who despite their nicknames didn't belong to the criminal underworld but were other young chess players working at the tournament, friends of "Big Daniel" Green.

They went to the "Pipo" and to their surprise they saw Fischer dining right there. They wished him good evening as they went past and after a short while, to their surprise and delight, Fischer brought his plate over, asking if he could sit with them. It was a dream come true.

During the meal Fischer showed them his game from that day against the Argentinean Rossetto, on the mythical pocket set from which he was never separated. He showed them the game at top speed, with an infinite number of variations, which of course his companions could not fully appreciate, but he frequently asked them for their opinion.

Fischer expressed an interest in playing a game of football, something he had taken a liking to in Yugoslavia, but those young men charged with organising it proved not to be the best people to carry out such a task.

Green had further contact with Fischer. One evening they went out to dine in a Japanese restaurant which was next to the Club Argentino, a type of food that did not at all appeal to a Buenos Aires boy in the habit of eating meat every day.

Green told me that when the time came to pay (obviously it was Fischer's treat), he took out an enormous bundle of dollars. Green had never seen a dollar bill and was captivated. Suddenly he looked up and saw Fischer's eyes fixed on him. Fischer realised what was going on and began to laugh.

One thing they had in common was that both of them were admirers of the singer José Feliciano. Fischer gave Green the task of finding some recordings of Feliciano and bringing them to his hotel.

He did so and the next day went to Fischer's hotel with his purchases, but they would not let him in. This was understandable. Who was going to believe a sixteen-year old boy who arrived at the hotel reception saying that Fischer was expecting him?

Somehow Green managed to slip into the hotel and they spent a long time chatting, but when he tried to leave the hotel he was intercepted by hotel security staff and was on the point of being sent to gaol. However, when they saw that nothing amiss had happened, he was able to leave.

When Fischer returned in 1971, to play against Petrosian, Green had grown a beard and had long hair, he looked different, but he waited for Fischer outside the match venue.

Fischer arrived to play, saw him and in spite of the change of appearance he recognised him. Fischer got out of the car which had brought him to the venue, the photographers all milled around him but Fischer pushed through them so that he could go up to Green and ask how he was.

Their evening meals were repeated, very often with the added company of GM Miguel Ángel Quinteros. Another place where Fischer liked to go was the Serafín pizzeria, and he loved grilled kidney sandwiches.

Something caught Green's attention: when Fischer finished a session of simultaneous games against twenty opponents, he asked him to get a copy of all the games. Very surprised, he did so and on returning to the hotel Fischer began to analyse them. Green objected that those games were worthless, and Fischer said this was not so, that a weak player can have a great idea which he cannot see through to the end, but that he, Fischer, could improve that idea. He gave a closing piece of advice: "Never underestimate anyone."

Recalling Fischer, Carlos Bielicki, who was world junior champion in 1958, told me that: "During the 1960 Mar del Plata International – Bobby would be going on 17 – I had some dealings with him, and he seemed like a polite boy, but a little strange.

On one occasion, after lunch I headed for the lifts in the Hotel Provincial, where the dining room was full of people. Suddenly I heard a voice behind me, almost shouting at me, in English, "I'm in better physical shape than you." I turned around and it was Fischer, so I said to him in my very poor English, "Naturally" and I think he was satisfied with my acknowledgement.

As regards the game we played – you can see it – I can tell you that given my ignorance of the line he played – and which he was very pleased with – I can't add anything – I could have played at some point, but I didn't, I gave up two pawns, I think, and he crushed me." (See Game 34)

Fischer and Bielicki didn't meet again. On the occasion of the Fischer – Petrosian match in 1971 in Buenos Aires, Bielicki was commentating on all the games for Chilean TV; he was in Chile taking part in a chess educational programme.

When the match was over, Quinteros, who was giving him the moves over the phone, called the Chilean TV channel, "and he said he was handing me over to a friend. It was Fischer, and he asked why I had given up chess. A year later he defeated Spassky and then he gave up the activity himself."

Returning to the 1970 Buenos Aires event, according to Tukmakov in that city there was a sort of "Fischer cult," which affected him very badly, so that he was unable to give of his best. He added that losing to Fischer was no dishonour, but that he would have liked to play under normal conditions. In a number of comments, you could sense that he was almost embarrassed by the way he played against Fischer.

"After the game he asked why I hadn't exploited an opportunity to complicate things. Most probably he was interested in the truth: what those complications would have led to. As it turned out, this was only a practical chance," said Tukmakov. He went on to say more about the impression Fischer made on him: "He was aware of his superiority, that was obvious, even though he was always polite and friendly."

Like many other observers, as we have already seen in the USSR – Rest of the World Match, Tukmakov noticed that "the start of any competition he dared to take part in was very painful for him, and the slightest thing was enough to make him leave.."

However, if he managed to overcome this initial phase and he felt comfortable, “he became a terrible, indomitable force and his talent shone through in all its splendour.”

Tukmakov commented: “The enormous popularity of chess in Argentina came as a surprise to me. The tournament was held in the small but cosy San Martín theatre with seating for about 700. Every day the theatre was packed, with spectators standing in the aisles. It was clear that these were knowledgeable fans. Their emotions were restrained by Fischer’s exacting demands.”

This restraint had an expiry date, as the tournament book relates: “... when the games began, absolute silence reigned, and this was broken only when Robert Fischer had won his game, after which restrained but prolonged applause was heard.”

And as for the Fischer “cult,” the tournament book confirms it: “...this brilliant master won many hearts in our country, and it can be stated that he became the idol of the Argentinean public (...). The fans made no secret of their preference. It was Fischer’s game they were interested in, and when he finished at least one third of the room emptied. (...) On one occasion in the room where a number of masters were making daily commentaries on the various possible lines of play, when one of them suggested showing a different game, the crowd demanded that he go back to Fischer’s game, and he had to give in to them.”

Robert Fischer
Vladimir Tukmakov
Larsen’s Opening [A01]
Buenos Aires (1), 22.07.1970

Fischer arrived late to the Buenos Aires tournament, on the day of the third round (which was not played that day), so that his first-round game, against Tukmakov, had to be moved to one of the first days set aside for adjourned games. (In those days games were usually adjourned after the 40th move).

The game began half an hour late, because Fischer made them change the lighting, because he considered it deficient, which was certainly the case.

1.b3

Fischer kept up to date with the trends and developments in opening theory, and although this opening wasn’t part of his main repertoire, here he shows the influence of Bent Larsen, who frequently opened with this move in those days.

This wasn’t the only time that Fischer followed in the footsteps of his future opponent in the Candidates matches. In the ninth round, against Agdamus, after 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 he played 2...b6, which was also played occasionally by Larsen.

To see the previous occasion on which Fischer failed to play 1.e4 in an official game (in simultaneous displays he played 1.b4 on several occasions) we have to go back to a 1957 to find a few games of his that began with 1.♘f3.

1.b3 e5 2.♗b2 ♘c6 3.c4 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗e7 5.a3 0-0 6.d3

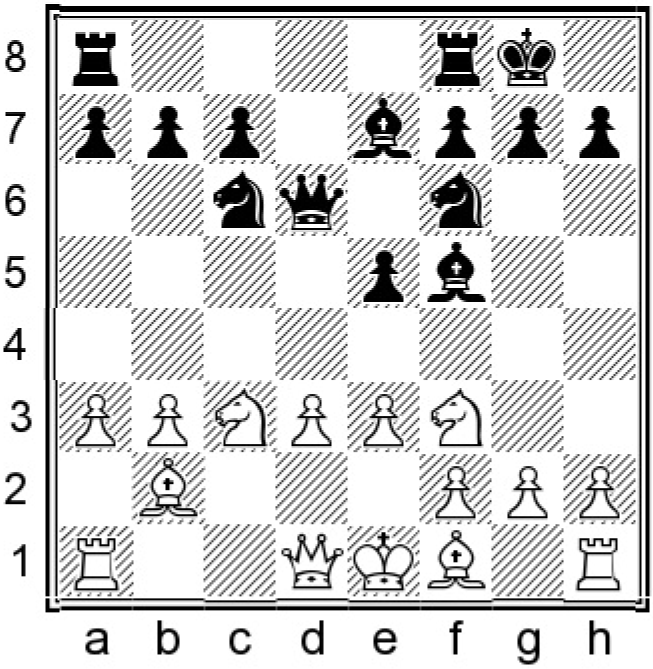
Fischer suggested the more flexible 6.♕c2, which he himself used against Ulf Andersson in Siegen a few months later, as we shall see.

6...d5 7.cxd5 ♕xd5

“More natural, and better, is 7...♘xd5, to continue the game within the characteristics of the Sicilian. Black’s plan is now based on organising good pressure against the enemy queen’s pawn, to force the e4-advance and occupy the d4-square. But this turns out to be a dream that cannot be realised.” (Tukmakov, in the tournament book).

Andersson, in a slightly different position, recaptured with the knight against Fischer in the game mentioned above.

8.♘c3 ♕d6 9.♘f3 ♗f5



Exercise: What did Fischer play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

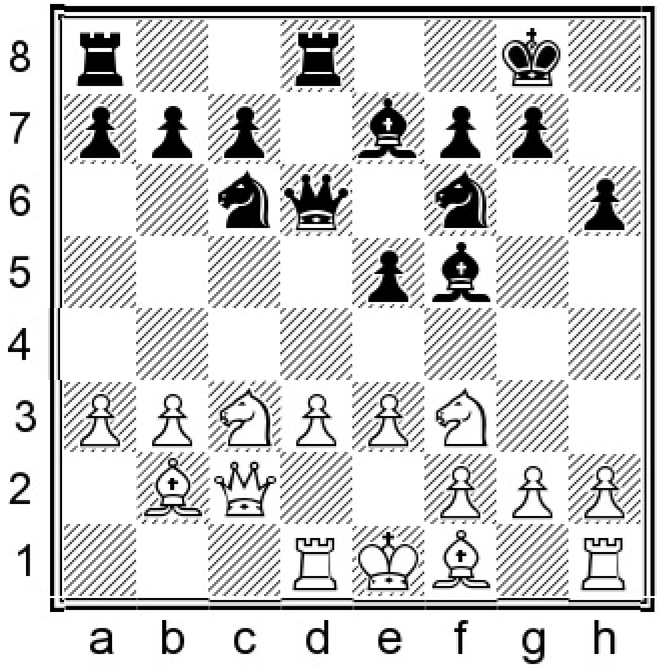
10.♕c2!

“Well played, whereas after 10.♗e2 ♖ad8 11.e4 ♗g4, Black’s hope would be perfectly justified,” (Tukmakov).

10...♖fd8

10...♖ad8 11.♖d1 ♖fe8 is another possibility.

11.♖d1 h6



12.h3

Question: What an unusual move; isn’t it better to continue development with 12.♗e2?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: It would seem so, but there is a concrete reason for playing this, as Tukmakov indicated: in the event of 12.♗e2 he was thinking of playing 12...♕e6, planning ...e4, and after 13.♘d2 ♗g4 Black would have good play.

On the other hand there is now the possibility of the untypical advance g4, if the circumstances are right.

12...♕e6

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13.♘d2!

As we know, if 13.♗e2?! then 13...e4!.

13...♘d7

Here the standard continuation 13...♖d7 14.♗e2 ♖ad8 was suggested, when following 15.♘ce4 ♘d5 the correct move would be 16.0-0.

Exercise: 16.b4 a6 17.♘c5 has been recommended, but there is a snag with this. How can Black improve on this line?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: After 16.b4? the typical "Sicilian sacrifice" 16...♘dxb4! (or using the other knight) is very strong, and after 17.axb4 ♘xb4 18.♕c1 ♘xd3+ 19.♗xd3 ♖xd3, with the idea of 20...♕d7, the white position collapses.

14.♗e2 ♔h8?

"Black loses the tread of the plan and quickly finds himself in a difficult situation," admitted Tukmakov.

After his own recommendation 14...♕g6!, he would have had a good position. After either 15.♘d5 ♗d6 16.g4 ♗e6, or the immediate 15.g4 ♗e6, fifty years on, Tukmakov's evaluation is endorsed by today's engines.

15.0-0 ♗g6

This might not be best, but the recommendation 15...♕g6 isn't as convincing now; after 16.♔h2 ♘b6 17.♘ce4, with the idea of 18.b4, or perhaps 18.g4, White has the preferable position.

Kasparov commented that after 16.♔h2 it would be weaker to play 16...♘c5 due to 17.♘ce4! ♘xe4 18.dxe4 ♗d7 19.f4!, and White takes the initiative.

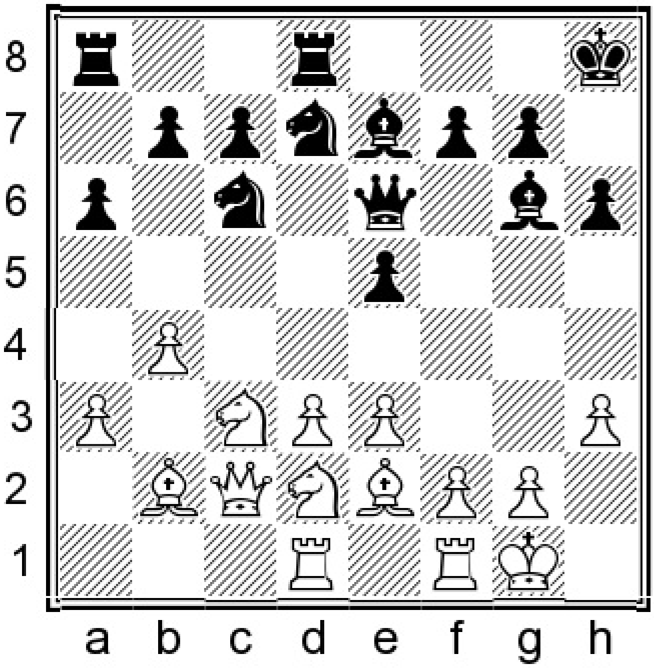
16.b4 a6

Question: Why not 16...f5? This seems more consistent with 15...♗g6 and is a normal Sicilian move.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: So it is, but this position isn't a normal one; in this case 16...f5 doesn't carry with it any threat of ...e4 or ...f4, due to the way the black pieces are deployed.

White would have the advantage after 17.♗f3!, e.g. 17...♘f6 18.b5 ♘a5 19.♘e2, while if 17...♘b6 there are several options, such as 18.♘b3, threatening 19.b5, with the idea of ♘c5 or ♘a5, as well as 18.♘e2, also threatening 19.b5, and with the added possibility of ♗xc6.



Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17.♖c1!

"Fischer energetically increases the pressure." (Tukmakov).

In contrast to the poorly coordinated black forces, White's are deployed more and more harmoniously. Before playing with the minor pieces, Fischer places his rooks on better squares. Now the king's rook can come into play on d1.

17...♖ac8 18.♖fd1 f5

Finally Black plays his own recommendation, but the situation is similar to the one described earlier. With this move Black "goes for broke," but it is difficult to suggest anything better; for instance if 18...♘b6 White can continue to make progress with 19.♘b3.

Exercise: How did Fischer proceed now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19.♘a4

“Unhurriedly completing the mobilization of his forces, White makes the most natural moves. He still has ♘b3 in reserve, whereas already Black appears to have no good plan and he devises a strange regrouping.” (Kasparov).

19...♘a7?

Opening the game on the kingside with 19...f4?! favours White, whose pieces are better after 20.exf4 exf4 21.♖e1 ♕f7 22.♗f3 or 22.♗g4, and the black pieces are uncoordinated; White also has ♕b3 as a positional threat.

The move in the game looks ugly. Instead, 19...♘b6, has been suggested, but after 20.♘c5 ♗xc5 21.bxc5 ♘d5 followed by e.g. 22.♘c4, or even 21.♕xc5 ♘a4 22.♕c2 ♘xb2 23.♕xb2, with the idea of ♘b3, the White’s position is preferable.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

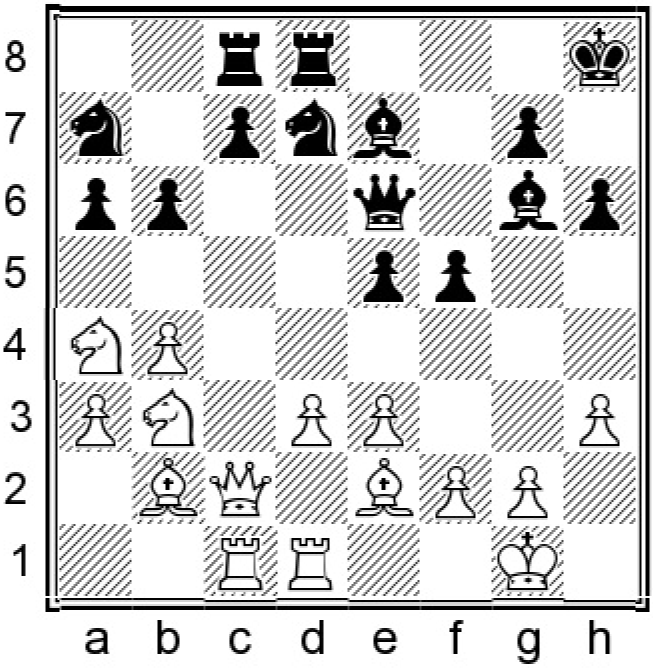
Answer:

20.♘b3!

Restraining Black’s idea of playing ...c5. On the other hand, “If 20.♗f3 the answer would be 20...b5 21.♘c3 c5, and everything is in order for Black.” (Tukmakov).

20...b6

Controlling the c5-square.



Exercise: How did Fischer improve his chances?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21.d4!

With this move one of the “rules” of the Sicilian is fulfilled: if this central advance can be carried under good conditions, the pieces, white in this case, are powerfully activated.

21...f4?!

Black embarks on tactical play; 21...♘b5 did not inspire confidence in view of 22.dxe5! ♘xe5 23.♘d4 ♘xd4 24.exd4, and Black has great difficulties in maintaining the material balance.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22.e4!

Taking up the challenge, after which “the spring uncoils!” (Kasparov).

On the other hand after 22.♗d3 ♗xd3 23.♕xd3 fxe3 24.fxe3 ♗g5, “Black can defend.” (Tukmakov).

22...♘b5?!

This move is a blunder. Tukmakov indicated that it was necessary to be consistent and play 22...♗xe4 23.♕xe4 ♕xb3, which leads to great complications, even though after 24.♗d3 ♘f6 25.♕b7 or 25.♕g6 objectively the complications favour White, but Black would obtain some practical chances and increase the chance of White going astray.

However, it is probable that Fischer would have continued with the line given by Tukmakov himself: 24.♗xa6!, and after 24...♕xa4 25.♗xc8 ♘f6 (or the line indicated by Tukmakov, 25...♖xc8 26.dxe5 ♘f8 27.e6, which is even better for White) 26.♕e2 ♘xc8 27.dxe5 ♘d5 28.e6 (with the idea of ♕h5) 28...♕e8 29.♕f3 c6 30.b5!, and White has a strong initiative.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer gain a conclusive advantage here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23.♗g4

It’s that simple; White wins decisive material.

23...♕f6 24.dxe5 ♘xe5 25.♗xc8 ♖xc8 26.♖d5

If 26...♗d6, then 27.♘xb6.

1–0

Game 45

“One of the prettiest moves in Fischer’s career”

Kasparov is quite critical of Fischer in the series of books about his predecessors, but he also pays frequent homage to his legacy and to his influence on the history of chess.

Regarding the King’s Indian Attack, which Fischer plays magnificently in this game, Kasparov commented: “In 1970, following Fischer’s example, many young players, including the author of these lines, tried playing this way.”

In this game he made a beautiful and lethal move which came as a surprise for everyone.

Robert Fischer
Oscar Panno

King’s Indian Attack [A04]

Buenos Aires (8), 30.07.1970

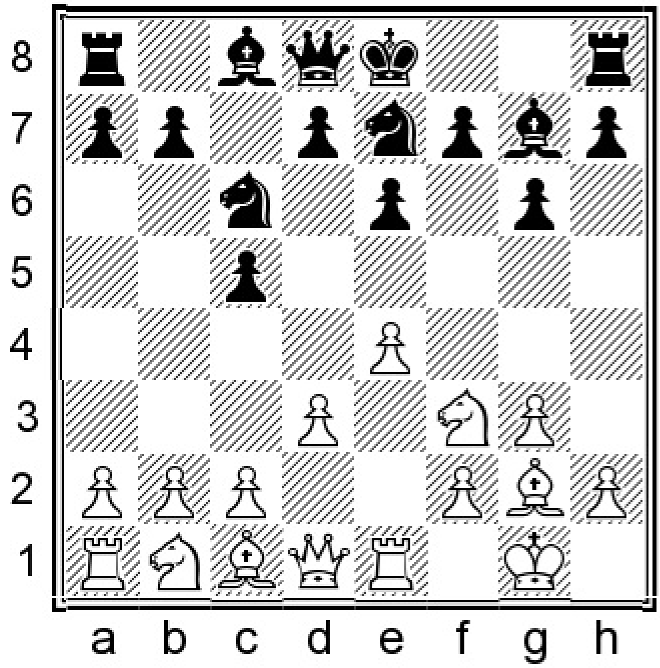
1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d3

A decision which by now doesn’t surprise us; Fischer liked to play the King’s Indian setup with both colours against this line with ...e6 (or e3 by White), because, as we know, he considered it rather passive.

3...♘c6 4.g3 g6

Black decides to deploy his bishop on g7 and king’s knight on e7, unlike what we have seen in several other games, where Black played ...♘f6 and ...♗e7.

5.♗g2 ♗g7 6.0-0 ♘ge7 7.♖e1



7...d6

It is often considered that 7...0-0 is inaccurate because it allows 8.e5 (8.c3 e5!), based on the brilliant game Petrosian - Pachman, Bled 1961, which continued 8...d6 9.exd6 ♕xd6 10.♘bd2 ♕c7 11.♘b3 ♘d4 12.♗f4 ♕b6 13.♘e5 ♘xb3? (13...♗xe5 is correct, according to Kasparov) 14.♘c4! ♕b5 15.axb3 a5 16.♗d6 ♗f6 17.♕f3 ♔g7 18.♖e4 ♖d8.

Exercise: How did Petrosian conclude the game?

Show/Hide Solution

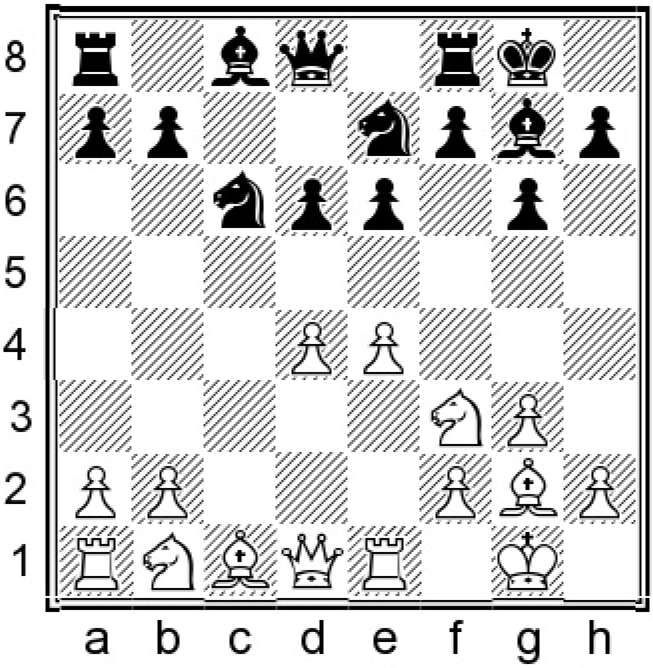
Answer: 19.♕xf6+!! (since the rook on e4 isn't needed to give mate, this sacrifice also worked on the previous move) 19...♔xf6 20.♗e5+ ♔g5 21.♗g7! 1–0.

However, postponing ...d6 with the calm 8...b6, played in García - Najdorf, Mar del Plata 1968, seems satisfactory for Black.

8.c3 0-0

After c3 Black also can play 8...e5 under acceptable conditions, e.g. 9.a3 0-0 10.b4 b6 11.♘bd2 h6 12.♘c4 ♗e6, with a reasonable position, Fang - Dvoretsky, Philadelphia 1991.

9.d4 cxd4 10.cxd4



10...d5

This allows White to reach a standard KIA position; it's a sound option, although it postpones concrete decisions concrete for later.

Subsequently a way was found to prevent White from carrying out his plan by playing 10...♕b6!.

Now if 11.d5 (11.♗e3?! ♕xb2) it is possible to play the quiet 11...♘d4 12.♘c3 exd5 13.exd5 ♘xf3+ 14.♗xf3 ♘f5 15.♗g2 ♗d7, and Black has no problems, Chikovani - Sideif Zade, Rostov on Don 1976.

Black can also play the sharper 11...♗xb2 12.♗xb2 ♕xb2 13.dxc6 (13.♘bd2! is better, with compensation for the pawn) 13...♕xa1 14.♕b3 (not 14.cxb7? ♗xb7 15.♕b3, because Black gains the advantage with 15...♗d5!) 14...♘xc6 15.♘c3 ♘d4! 16.♖xa1 ♘xb3 17.axb3 ♗d7, with balanced play, Ljubojević - Hübner, Buenos Aires 1978, and other games.

11.e5 ♗d7?!

Question: How can this be dubious? It’s a developing move and as the bishop has no better square, it seems a flexible move, keeping other options open.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: This move and some of the following ones are questionable, because although they help with development they are also passive, allowing White to consolidate his centre and his advantage in space.

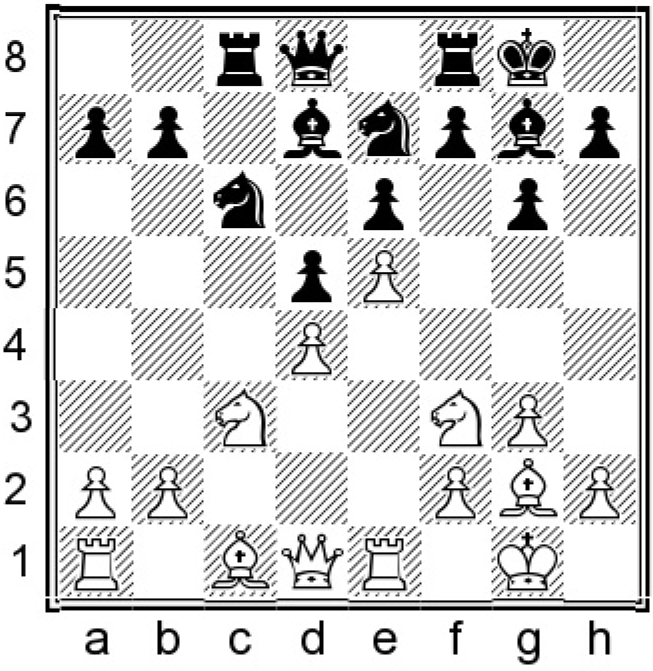
It wasn’t easy to realise it, but we’re at a critical point where specific measures are needed, rather than moves of a general character.

Kasparov recommended challenging White’s advanced central pawn right away (before it’s too late) with 11...f6!, and after 12.exf6 ♗xf6 13.♗h6 ♖e8 the bishop on g7 has been activated and puts pressure on d4.

Instead, 12.♗f4 has been recommended, supporting e5, but it seems that White can’t keep control, e.g. 12...♘f5 13.♘c3 g5! 14.exf6 ♗xf6 and if 15.♗e5 g4 16.♗xf6 ♕xf6 17.♘e5 h5, threatening to take on d4, Black has active play and is fine.

Possibly Fischer would have simply played 12.♘c3, maintaining his pawn on e5, and delaying a decision about his c1-bishop.

12.♘c3 ♖c8



Exercise (simple): What did Fischer play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13.♗f4

Of course, it's often necessary just to play the most obvious moves; Fischer continues with his development, overprotecting e5 – there is nothing better.

13...♘a5?

Black is consistent with his idea of counterattacking on the queenside, but it is possible that this was a blunder, because soon we shall see that the attacking race conducted on opposite wings will be resolved in White's favour.

It was still better to play with the plan of ...f6, either now or first 13...♘f5 and then 14...f6.

14.♖c1 b5

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

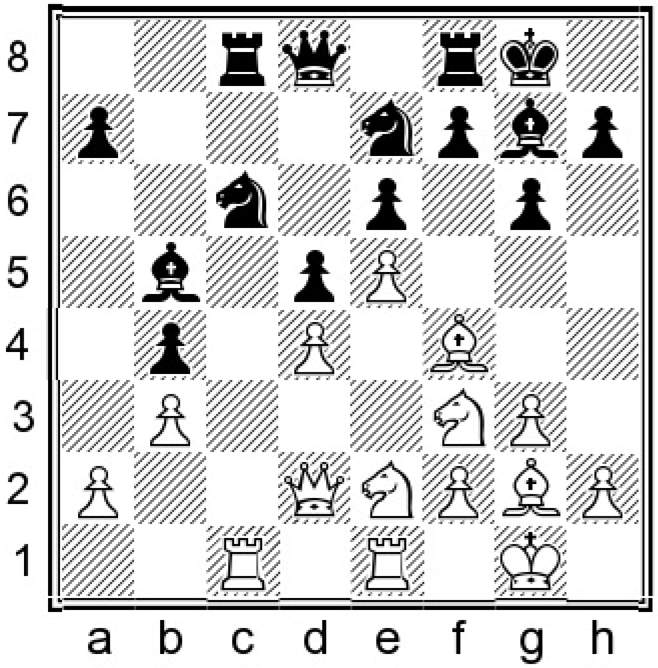
15.b3!

Leaving the a5-knight with nothing to do and not fearing the advance ...b4; it's worth noting that this move was prepared with 14.♖c1, defending the knight on c3.

15...b4 16.♘e2 ♗b5

Black would achieve little with 16...♖xc1 17.♘xc1 ♗b5 18.♘d3 ♗xd3 19.♕xd3, reaching a position similar to the one we shall see later; White has better play.

17.♕d2 ♘ac6



Exercise: How did Fischer try make progress here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18.g4!

White plans to add his e2-knight to the attacking force, reviving his inactive piece.

18...a5

Black continues with the idea of the counterattacking on the queenside, but he will not manage to create any serious threats.

Question: Why not 18...♗xe2? This bishop isn’t a very important piece, it it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Initially, in the light of what happened in the game, 18...♗xe2 was recommended, but isn’t a clear improvement, since after 19.♕xe2 ♕b6 we would reach a position similar to the one mentioned in the previous note, and after e.g. 20.♕e3 with ideas such as ♗g5, followed by h4-h5 and ♗f1–d3, White can play on both wings, with advantage, because there is no black counterplay.

19.♘g3 ♕b6

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20.h4!

The h-pawn will be needed to weaken Black's castled position.

20...♘b8

Seeking relief with the exchange of rooks.

Exercise (simple): How did White's offensive continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21.♗h6!

Before playing h5 White eliminates the best defender of Black's kingside, creating direct threats with greater speed, as we shall see.

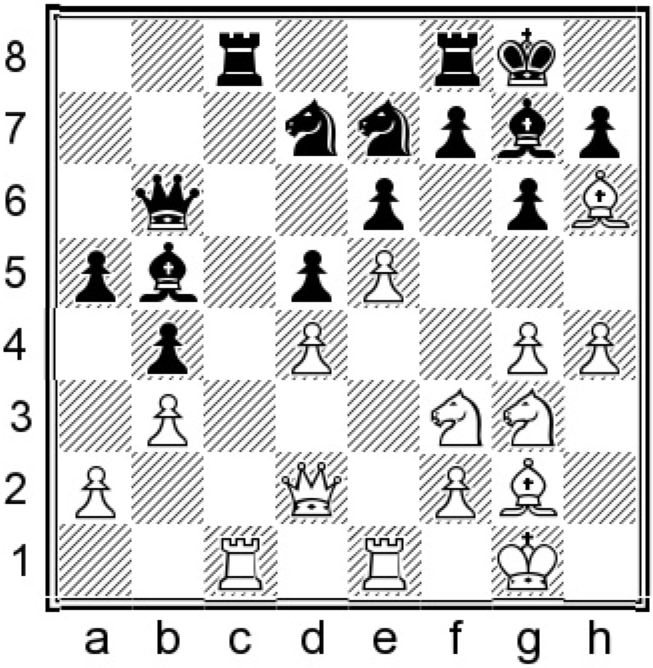
This recipe, exchanging the fianchettoed bishop and then breaking with h4-h5 is somewhat reminiscent of Fischer's "Dragon-killing" exploits that we already have seen.

Question: But couldn't Black have prevented the exchange of bishops by playing 20...♖fe8 before trying to exchange rooks, so that he could answer 21.♗h6 with 21...♗h8. Wasn't that better?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: This was playable, but it wasn't an adequate defence; the bishop on h6 would be very strong and f7 would be left weak. In fact White could obtain an unstoppable attack with e.g. 22.♕f4, followed by ♘g5 and h5, and with the rooks still on the board White also has available the manoeuvre ♖e3-f3.

21...♘d7



Exercise: What to play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22.♕g5!

With the inclusion of the queen, the attack gains in strength; the threat is now to play ♗xg7 and then capture the knight on e7.

It has been noted elsewhere that 22.♘h5 was inadequate, due, among other things, to 22...♖xc1 23.♖xc1 ♗xh6 24.♕xh6 gxh5, there are many other possible lines but the finish here could be for instance 25.♕g5+ ♔h8 26.♕xe7 hxg4 27.♘g5 ♕xd4 28.♘xf7+ ♔g8 29.♘h6+ ♔h8 30.♘f7+, with a draw.

We can only speculate, but based on what we have seen of Fischer's play, I think we can be fairly sure that Fischer would have devoted very little time to the analysis of these premature complications.

22...♖xc1 23.♖xc1 ♗xh6

This prevents White's threat but of course it also brings the white queen to a very dangerous position; Black is relying on being able to defend h7 satisfactorily with a timely ...♘f8.

The counter-blow 23...f6 does little to stem White's initiative; a possible continuation is 24.exf6

♗xh6 (24...♗xf6 25.♕e3, followed by ♗h3, also fails to bring much relief) 25.♕xh6 ♘xf6 26.♗h3!, followed by h5, when Black has serious weaknesses: e6, the e5-square and naturally his king position.

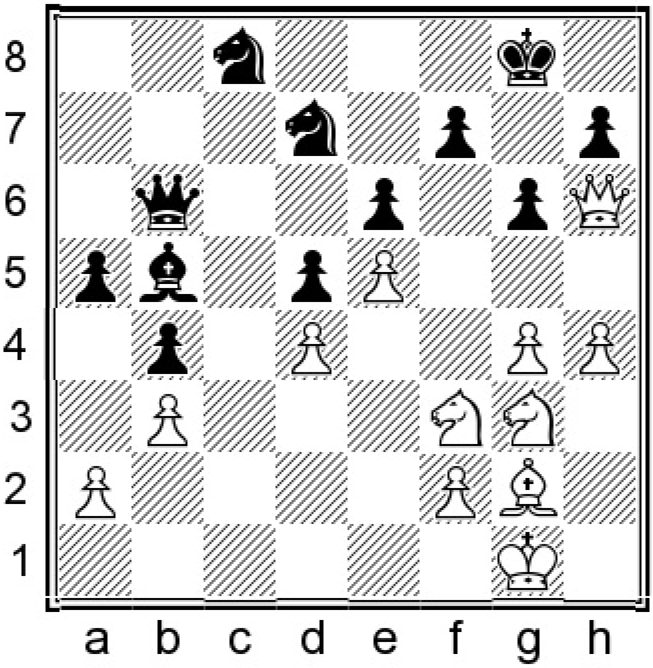
24.♕xh6 ♖c8

Black declines to open the game, relying on his defensive resources. If 24...f6 is strong then 25.♗h3 or the immediate 25.h5 are both strong.

25.♖xc8+

Unlike what is usually the case, these exchanges don't bring any relief to the defence. White's kingside attack has no need of rooks for it to be devastating, despite the fact that for the moment it seems that White is only able to attack with his queen and one knight.

25...♘xc8



Exercise (simple): How to continue the attack?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

26.h5

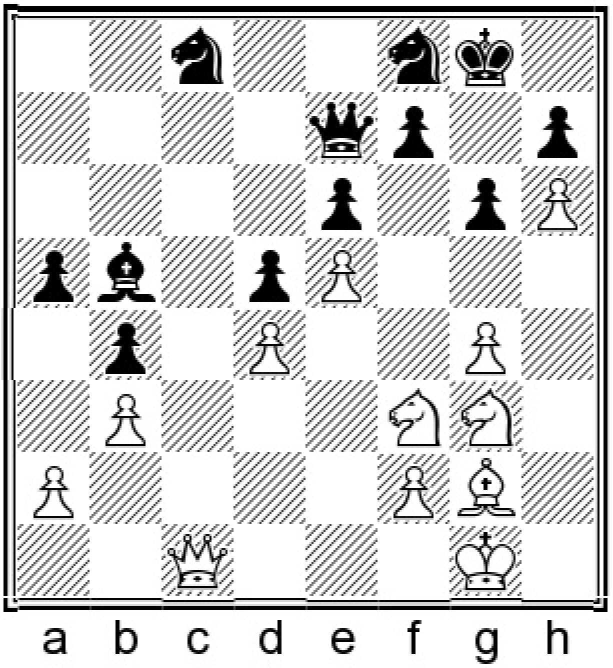
Of course, White plays the last "obligatory" attacking move.

26...♕d8?

All commentators have indicated the defence 26...♘f8, preventing 27.♘g5? due to 27...♕xd4 28.♘xh7 ♘xh7 29.hxg6 ♘f8!, and Black can repel the attack, since he can play ...♕xe5, and the queen joins in the defence.

27.♕g5!, threatening h6 and ♕f6, is stronger; Black defends with 27...♕c7, and after 28.h6, 28...♘d7? loses, because White can brutally destroy the black defences with 29.♘h5 ♘a7 30.♘h4! ♔f8 (or 30...♕c8 31.♗xd5! exd5 32.e6) 31.♘g7 ♕c8 32.♗xd5! exd5 (32...♘c6 33.♘xe6+) 33.e6 fxe6 (or 33...f6 34.♕f4) 34.♘xg6+! hxg6 35.♘xe6+ ♔f7 36.♘d8+! ♔f8 37.h7, etc.; all these lines pointed out by Kasparov in 2005 still remain valid fifteen years later.

As Kasparov indicated, only 28...♕e7 would avoid immediate defeat, although the difficulties after 29.♕c1 and then ♗f1, obtaining entry squares on the queenside, to add to the ones already gained on the kingside, would make Black's position almost indefensible in the medium or long term.



Let's look at an example of how the game might continue: 29...♕d8 30.♗f1! ♗xf1 31.♔xf1 ♘d7, and now White can leisurely regroup with e.g. 32.♔g2, and after 32...♘a7 33.♘e2 ♕c8 (expelling the queen from the c-file, to prevent ♕c6) 34.♕f4 ♘b5 35.♘c1! ♘c3 36.♘d3 ♘e4 (there is no time for 36...♘xa2 in view of 37.♘g5 ♕f8 38.♘c5 ♘b8 39.♕f6 a4 40.♘cxe6! fxe6 41.♕xe6+ ♔h8 42.♕xd5, threatening ♕b7, with a decisive attack) 37.♘g5 ♘xg5 38.♕xg5 ♕e8 39.♔g3, controlling all the counterattacks by the black queen, leaving Black practically in zugzwang – he must soon allow ♘c5 or a queen invasion along the c-file after ♕c1.

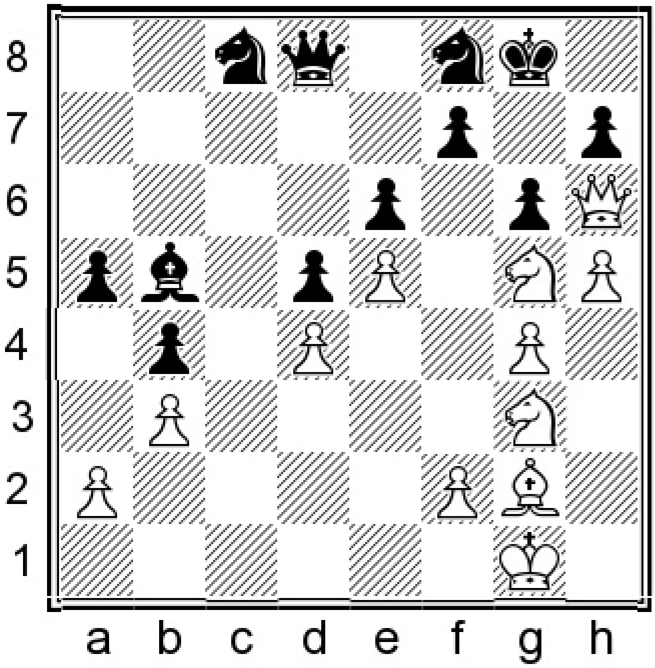
Of course there are further possibilities, but the general panorama doesn't change. White prepares the invasion of his pieces, while Black is unable to organise a good defence due to the weakness of his king.

26...♗d3 was suggested by Panno in informal conversation in the 1990s; the engines of early 2021 punish this move with the same formula as we have already seen: 27.♗f1!, diverting the defensive bishop. Then if 27...♕b5 White has the pretty refutation 28.♘e4! dxe4 29.♘g5 ♘f8 30.♘xe4 winning.

In the event of 27...♗xf1 then 28.♘g5 ♘f8 29.♘xh7! ♘xh7 30.hxg6 fxg6 31.♕xg6+ ♔f8, and here 32.♔xf1, analysed by Kasparov, wins, but 32.♕xh7 is somewhat stronger according to the current engines, since Black cannot defend against the attack by the queen and the knight, to which if necessary White can add the passed g-pawn.

Here's an example: 32...♗a6 (defending the knight, to maintain the material advantage) 33.♘h5 ♕b5 34.♔h2! ♕b7 35.♕h6+ ♔e7 36.♘f4 ♕b6 37.♕g7+ ♔e8 38.♕g6+ ♔d7 (or 38...♔e7 39.♕f6+ ♔d7 40.♕f7+) 39.♕f7+ ♘e7 40.♘g6, regaining the piece with a decisive attack.

27.♘g5 ♘f8



At first sight it might appear that everything is defended and White cannot revitalise his attack.

Exercise: How did Fischer this wasn't the case?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

28.♗e4!!

"Mind moves matter" (Voltaire), commented Marcos Luckis in the tournament book.

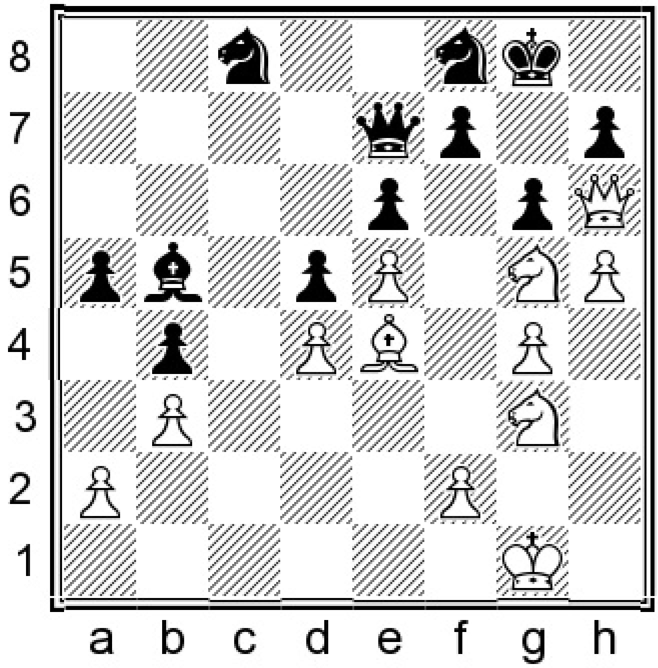
This spectacular move is even stronger than the also effective 28.♘xh7!, e.g. 28...♘xh7 29.hxg6 fxg6 30.♕xg6+ ♔h8 31.♕xe6 ♘e7 32.f4, and the three passed pawns should win, with or without the queens.

The move played is, after all, “typical of Fischer: despite everything his favourite bishop switches to an attacking diagonal – the g6-point begins to creak!” (Kasparov).

28...♕e7

Black no has defence after 28...dxe4 29.♘3xe4, followed by ♘f6+.

28...♗e8 is also inadequate, in view of 29.hxg6 hxg6 30.♘h5! gxh5 31.♗h7+ ♘xh7 32.♘xh7 f6 33.♘xf6+ ♔f7 34.g5 ♔e7 35.♕h7+ ♔f8 36.g6 ♗xg6 37.♕xg6, and wins.



Exercise (simple): How did Fischer finish off the game?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29.♘xh7!

The engines point out that 29.♘f5! was also decisive, but this is of little importance.

29...♘xh7 30.hxg6 fxg6

Or 30...♘f8 31.g7.

31.♗xg6 ♘g5

31...♘f8 32.♘h5 and 31...♕g7 32.♗xh7+ ♕xh7 33.♕xe6+, followed by 34.♕xc8, also lose.

32.♘h5 ♘f3+ 33.♔g2 ♘h4+ 34.♔g3 ♘xg6 35.♘f6+ ♔f7 36.♕h7+

1–0

Buenos Aires 1970 Antonio Martín, tournament referee, Bobby Fischer, and the muralists Sergio Giardelli and Daniel Green. Clarín Newspaper

Game 46

Lasker's legacy

As we know, Fischer's chess knowledge was very great, since he made the maximum use of the media available in his day, i.e. magazines and books.

He knew everything that was relevant and used ideas that appeared in Russian chess literature. It is not surprising that he also revitalised old variations and made use of ideas from the masters of the past. In this game he uses a surprising idea of Lasker's, one which is very well known due to its historical importance.

Robert Fischer
Wolfgang Unzicker

Ruy Lopez Exchange Variation [C69]
Siegen Olympiad, Final A (7), 21.09.1970

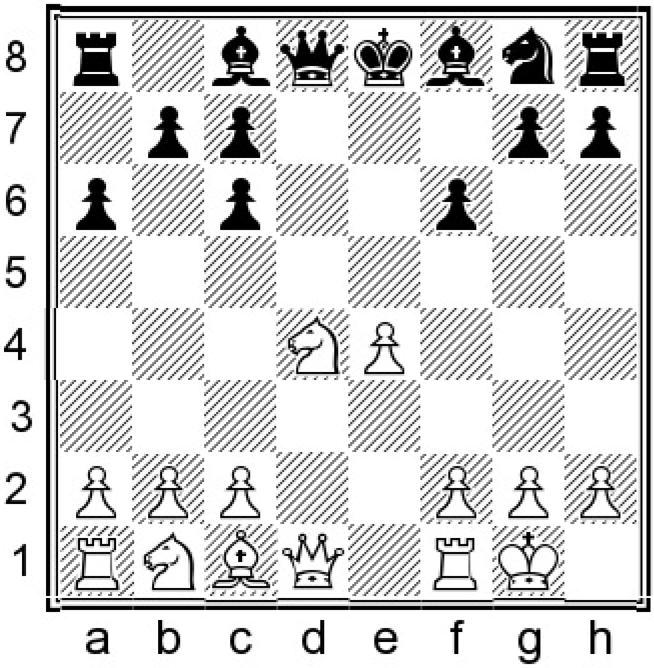
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗xc6 dxc6 5.0-0

Fischer's personal approach to the Exchange Variation, as we have seen, was to castle kingside immediately after exchanging on c6, instead of postponing any commitment of the White king, as Lasker did.

5...f6 6.d4 exd4

A popular move, although, as we've already mentioned, Fischer himself and another expert, Lajos Portisch, considered that 6...♗g4 was more accurate.

7.♘xd4



7...♘e7

Varying from 7...c5, which we saw in Game 31; this is also an idea of Portisch's.

8.♗e3 ♘g6 9.♘d2

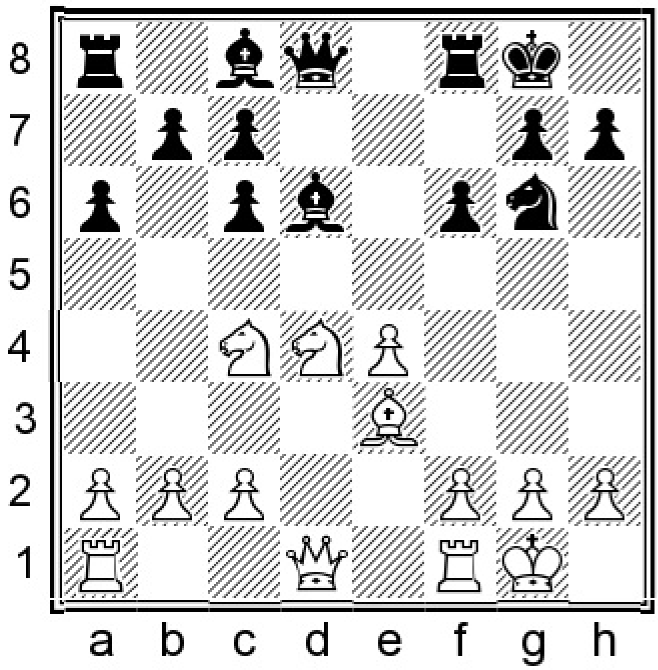
Question: I understand that we are in the opening and there's a lot of theory, but why doesn't White gain space and control e5 with 9.f4?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Expanding with 9.f4 is considered premature and is even dubious in Portisch’s opinion, as after 9...c5 10.♘f3 ♕xd1 11.♖xd1 ♗g4 Black has good play, the pawns at e4 and f4 will require attention, Hort - Portisch, Skopje 1968.

Other possible moves are 9.♘c3 and 9.♕h5, which, let us remember, Portisch considered was rather unpleasant for Black.

9...♗d6 10.♘c4 0-0



Exercise: Fischer played a logical novelty in this position; what do you think it was?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

11.♕d3

This is Fischer’s new move; the queen is brought into play immediately, to make way for the a1-rook and to try to control important light squares.

Portisch had had excellent results with Black in this position. The idea of seizing the diagonal a2-g8 at an opportune moment is much better implemented in this manner than with 11.c3 ♖e8 12.f3 ♗f8 13.♕b3 ♔h8, which came to an abrupt end after 14.♖fe1? c5 15.♘f5 ♗e6 16.a4 ♘e5 17.♖ad1 ♕c8 0–1, Damjanovic - Portisch, Palma de Mallorca 1967.

11.♘xd6 cxd6 12.♕d2 ♖e8 13.f3 ♘e5 also fails to present Black with any problems and after 14.♗f2? (it is better to defend against 14...♘c4 with 14.♕c3!, clearing the d-file for the rook on a1)

14...d5 15.exd5 ♕xd5 16.♖fe1 ♗f5! Black obtained good play, Barczay - Portisch, Sousse 1967.

11...♘e5 12.♘xe5 ♗xe5

Of course the recapture 12...fxe5? leaves Black with the worse structure and without the bishop pair after 13.♕b3+ ♔h8 14.♘e6.

After the move played, Kasparov wonders: “Which is more important: Black’s bishop pair or White’s pawn majority on the kingside?”.

It is true that this dilemma is posed as early as 6...exd4.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

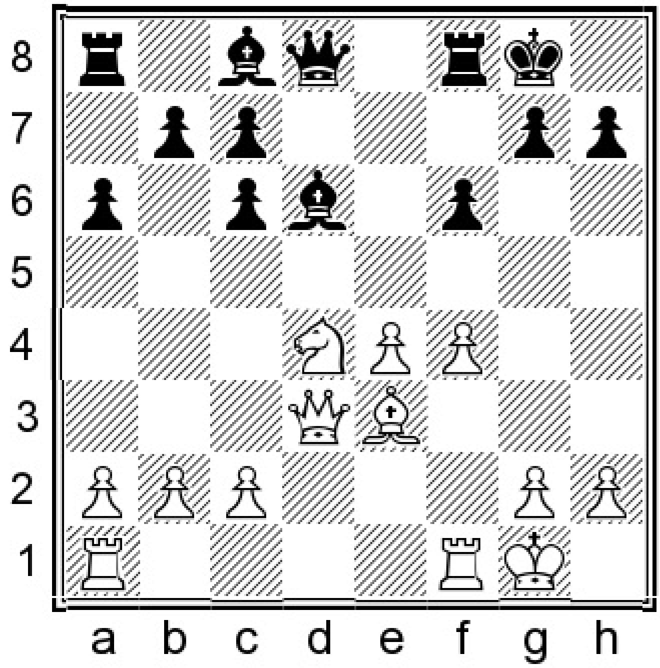
Answer:

13.f4!

“Restricting the bishops. It is typical of Fischer that he is not concerned about opposite-coloured bishops and the further simplification of the position. In our time there is perhaps no one else who so believes in the accumulation of small advantages.” (Suetin, quoted by Kasparov).

13...♗d6

The exchange 13...♗xd4 is unsatisfactory; after 14.♗xd4 ♗e6 15.f5 ♗f7 16.♕c3 (16.♕e3, with the same idea, is also interesting) 16...♕d7 17.e5! fxe5 18.♗xe5 ♗d5 19.♕g3 ♖ae8 20.♖ad1, “when, with the queens on the board, the opposite-coloured bishops would merely help White’s attack,” wrote Kasparov. In Dvoretsky’s books, as well as those of various other authors, such as Koblencs, there are several chapters devoted to positions such as this, where the attacking side sometimes seems to have an extra piece.



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

14.f5!

Here we can see Lasker’s legacy; White wants to restrict the c8-bishop. Compared with the Lasker - Capablanca game, White is better placed to make this advance, as for now the e4-pawn isn’t so weak.

“To get squares you have to give up squares” is a phrase repeated by Fischer, and this is a good demonstration.

It’s clear that there’s a lot of truth in the necessity to take radical measures when there is no simple way to make progress. Najdorf used to say something similar: “If you want to get something, you need to give something, old chap!”. (Curiously, he said “Viejo,” in Spanish, as his nickname).

14...♕e7

It’s not possible to expel the knight from d4 with 14...c5, as after 15.♘b3 White wins a pawn, because 15...b6?? loses to 16.♕d5+.

Kasparov suggested 14...♔h8, evading any checks on the diagonal, with the idea of 15...c5.

If White choses e.g. 15.♘f3 Black can create effective pressure against e4 by playing 15...b6 16.♗d4 c5 17.♗c3 ♗b7, according to Gulko, since rather than being a much desired central break, the advance 18.e5?! merely opens the game for the black bishops after 18...fxe5 19.♘xe5 ♕g5.

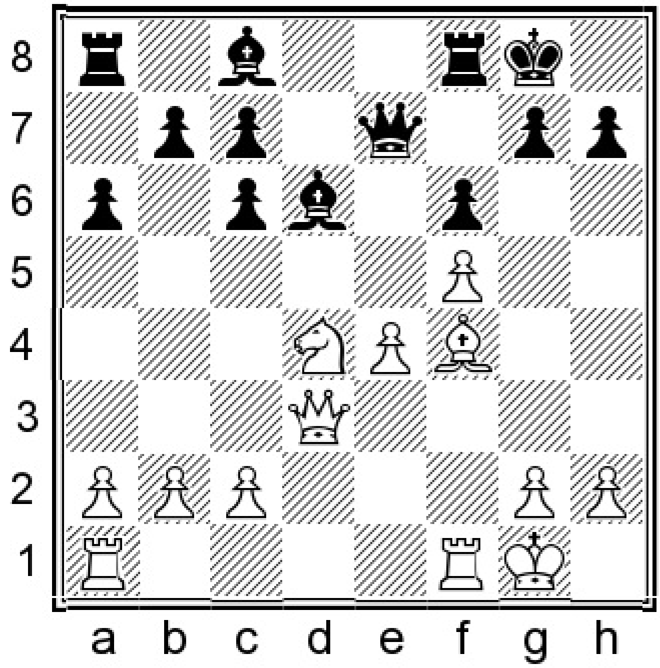
After 15.♗f4 ♗xf4 16.♖xf4 c5 the best retreat seems 17.♘e2, intending to go to f4 at an appropriate moment, and after 17...♕xd3 18.cxd3 ♖d8 19.♖f3 b6 White can continue with 20.g4, ♔f2, etc., maintaining some advantage.

After 14...♔h8 the move 15.♖ad1 would also have been interesting, with the same idea, ♗f4, to be able to recapture on d3 with the rook subsequently.

15.♗f4

Fischer follows faithfully in Lasker's footsteps, exchanging the bishops and then seeking to break, either on e5 or with g4-g5, in order to highlight White's superior structure, just as Lasker achieved against Capablanca.

" As usual in such technical positions, Fischer acts with iron consistency," wrote Kasparov.



15...♗xf4

Black is unwilling to repeat Capablanca's recipe of allowing the capture on d6, and opts to exchange the bishops himself, with which White White's kingside pawn remains mobile, while the black majority has no relevance.

It's a small step froward for White, but of course it's not yet enough to seriously unbalance the position.

There were several options:

After 15...♖d8 there would follow 16.♗xd6 ♖xd6 17.♖ae1, slowly preparing the e5-break, which would be achieved in the event of e.g. 17...♕f7 18.♕c3 ♗d7 19.e5.

Both 17...♗d7 18.♕b3+ ♔h8 19.♕xb7 and 17...c5 18.♕c4+ ♕f7 19.♕xc5 lose a pawn without compensation, while after the safer 17...♖d8 White could play 18.♕c4+ ♕f7 19.♕c3, followed by

♘f3, and White continues to make progress.

Kasparov mentioned Gulko's suggestion 15...♗d7, after which White could play 16.♗xd6 cxd6 17.♖ad1 ♖fe8 18.♖fe1, with a different structure: the pawn on d6 is backward, but so is the one on e4 – which is going to matter most?

There is also Suetin's suggestion 15...♗c5, intending to answer 16.♖ad1 with 16...♗b6, " with the idea of ...♗d7 and ...♖ad8, retaining the two bishops with a more complicated game." (Kasparov).

16.♖xf4 ♗d7

After 16...♖d8 White would continue to prepare the e5-break by means of the now familiar manoeuvre 17.♕c4+ ♕f7 18.♕c3, followed by 19.♘f3.

17.♖e1

Fischer brings his inactive piece into play, continuing to prepare the e5-break.

17...♕c5

17...c5 is not sufficient to equalise, as White could break on e5 after 18.♘f3 ♗c6 19.♕c4+ ♔h8 by means of the tactical resource 20.♘h4!, threatening ♘g6+, 20...♗e8 21.e5! fxe5 22.♘f3, with advantage.

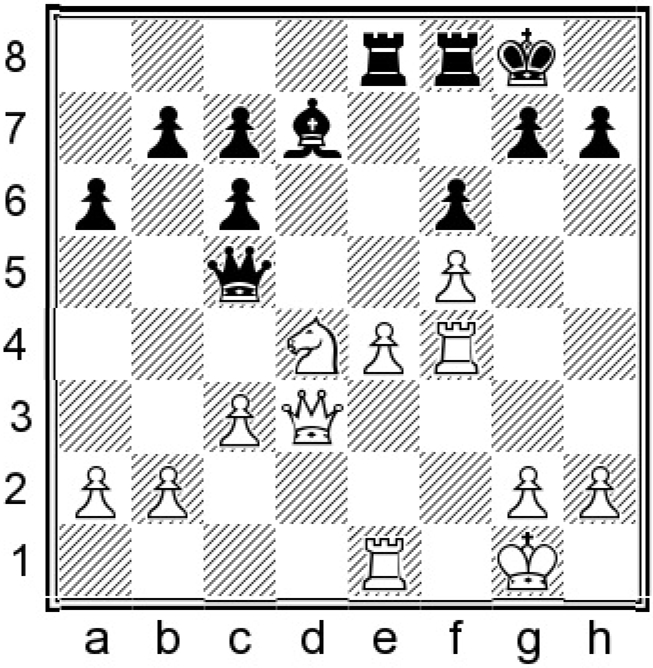
17...♕b4 was interesting, when 18.♕b3+ ♕xb3 19.♘xb3 isn't promising in view of 19...b6! and after 20.e5 fxe5 21.♖xe5 c5!, followed by ...♖ad8 or ...♖ae8, it's not clear that playing e5 has been a great achievement, because the play has opened up in favour of the now revived bishop and the black rooks.

Another way is 18.♘f3 ♖ad8 19.♕b3+ ♕xb3 20.axb3 c5 21.g4, preparing e5 or g5.

18.c3

The engines prefer 18.♖f2, but Fischer wants a more stable solution to the knight's need for protection.

18...♖ae8



Black has completed his development and Fischer must decide on a plan of action.

Exercise: How do you think that Fischer continued?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19.g4!

With this move he defends the f-pawn solidly, and now, in addition to the main advance e4-e5, there is the added possibility of the g-break.

Opening up White’s castled position like this doesn’t entail any risks at the moment, because there are no black pieces in a position to threaten the white monarch. However, as we have already seen, when the position opens up the black bishop can create obstacles in the way of the realisation of White’s advantage. But, as we well know now... “If you want to get something, you need to give something, old chap!”.

It’s worth pointing out that the engines of early 2021 prefer 19.♖f3 or 19.♖f2.

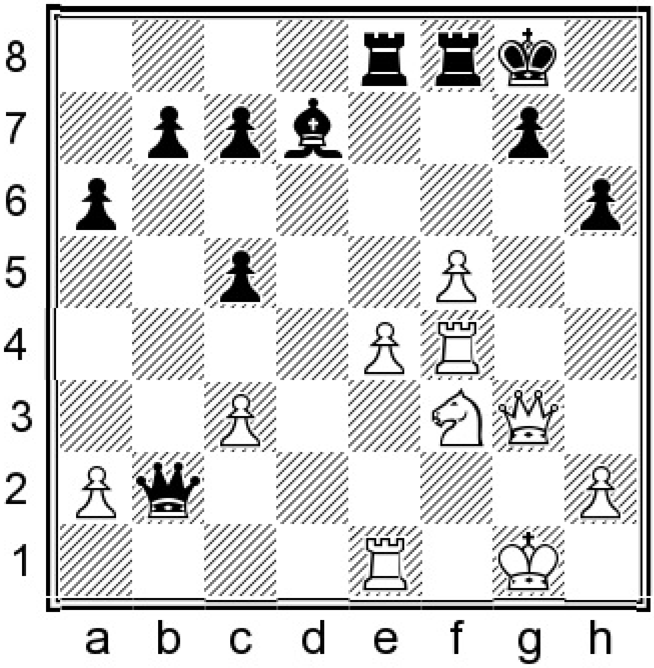
19...♕d6 20.♕g3

The queen defends the rook and at the same time supports a possible g5.

20...♖e7

20...c5 has been suggested, and if 21.♘f3 then 21...♕b6, but White can sacrifice the b2-pawn and play 22.g5! and in the event of 22...♕xb2 23.gxf6 ♖xf6 24.♘h4 ♖ff8 25.e5 White has compensation for the pawn.

The opening of the play on the kingside also favours White in the event of 22...fxg5 23.♘xg5 h6 (not immediately 23...♕xb2 due to 24.♖h4 and wins) 24.♘f3 ♕xb2.



Exercise: How can White make progress, taking into account the attack on his pawns at c3 and a2?

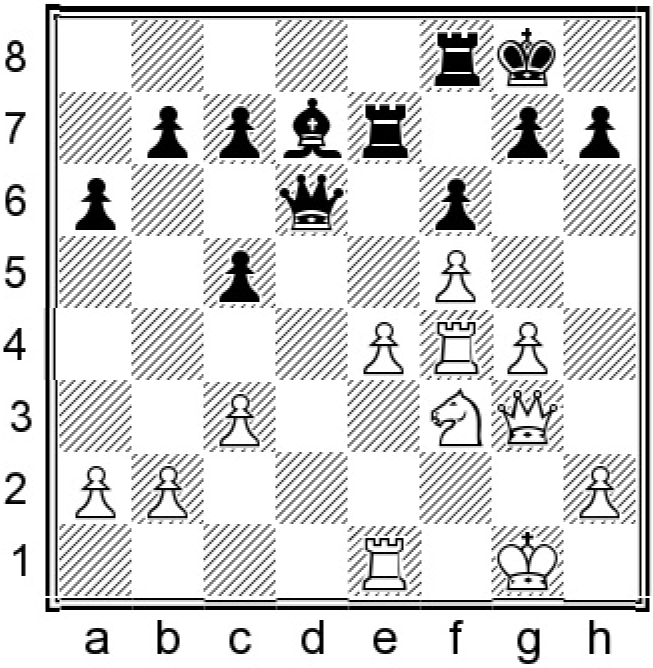
Show/Hide Solution

Answer: White defends his c3-pawn, which is vital for preventing the black queen coming back to aid the defence, with the spectacular move 25.♘e5!!, attacking d7, when 25...♖xe5 fails to 26.♖f2!, while after 25...♕d2 a possible continuation is 26.♖g4! ♖xe5 27.♖xg7+ ♔h8 28.♖xd7!, with advantage to White.

21.♘f3

21.g5 was possible, but Fischer decides to retreat the knight to prepare both breaks, e5 or g5.

21...c5



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

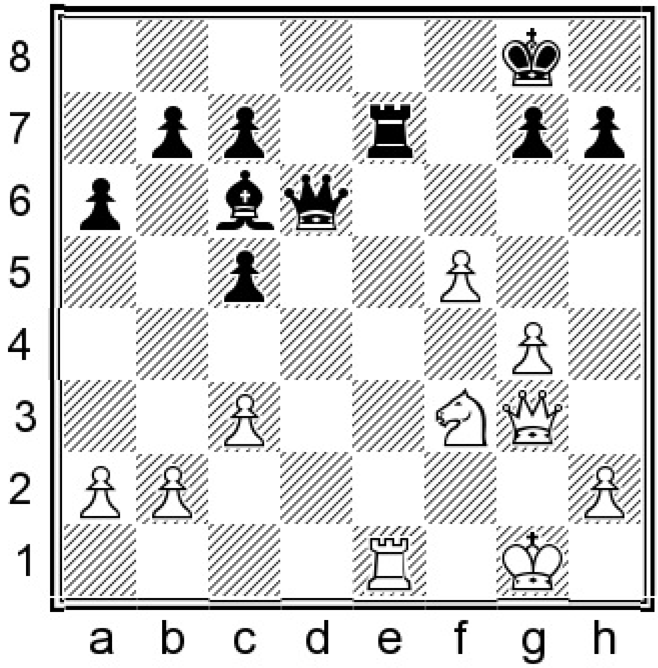
22.e5!

Finally White achieves one of his pawn breaks and is able to exploit his kingside pawn majority, although we can't yet talk of a clear advantage, as the white king is somewhat insecure and requires care.

22...fxe5 23.♖fe4 ♗c6 24.♖xe5 ♖fe8

24...♖xe5 25.♘xe5 ♖e8 was possible, because the rook on e8 prevents any tactical ideas favourable to White, but it would be a strictly defensive measure and White would possibly continue with 26.g5, posing the threat of f5-f6, and also with the idea of h4-h5.

25.♖xe7 ♖xe7



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

26.♘e5!

Preserving as much material as possible for the moment.

26...h6

In Kasparov's opinion this useful *luft* is better than opting for the queen ending arising from 26...♕d5 27.♘xc6 ♖xe1+ 28.♕xe1 ♕xc6, because White has the paralysing move 29.♕e7!, followed by 30.♔f2, with advantage.

We can add that that if the queen ending doesn't seem to be the maximum that the position offers, White also has 27.g5, followed by h4, and even h5, suffocating the black position before taking any other measures.

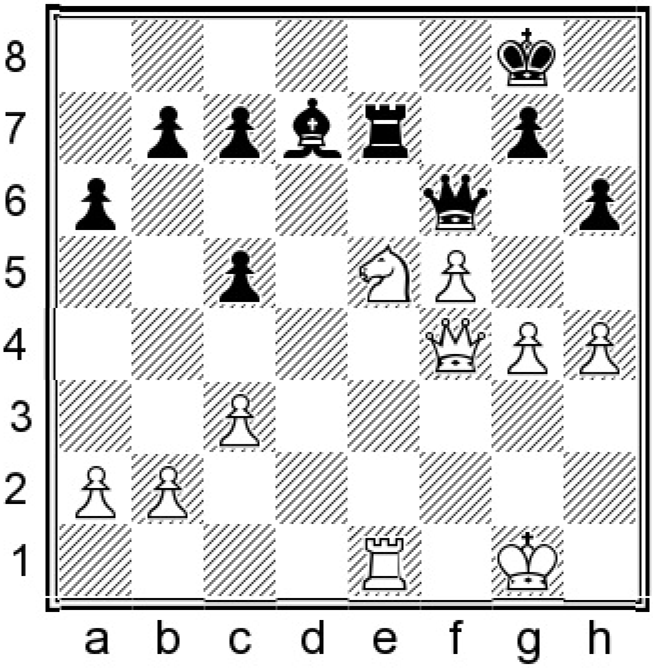
27.h4 ♗d7!

Black continues to defend accurately. It would be a mistake to exchange with 27...♕d2 28.♕f2 ♕xf2+? 29.♔xf2, as White has a great advantage in the ending, because his pieces are more active and once again his kingside majority is mobile.

Nor should we discount the advance of White's majority with the queens on the board, e.g. if

27...♕d5 then naturally 28.g5 follows, while if 27...♗d5 the attack on the a2-pawn isn't relevant, because it allows 28.g5! hxg5 29.hxg5 ♗xa2 30.f6!, with a strong attack, for example 30...♖e8 31.♕f4! ♖f8 32.♕h4 gxf6 33.♘g6, and wins.

28.♕f4 ♕f6



Exercise: How did Fischer respond to the attack on the h4-pawn?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29.♖e2!

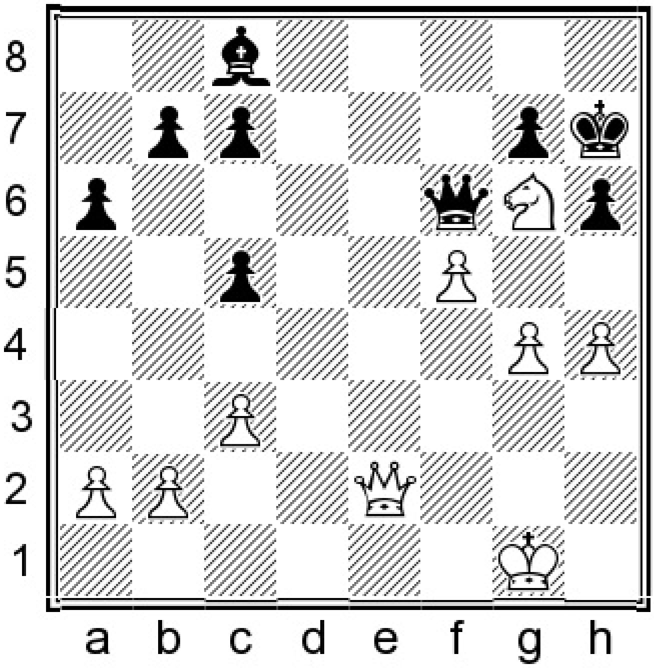
Indirectly defending the pawn, since 29...♕xh4? loses to 30.♘g6.

29.♖e3! was also interesting, with the idea of having 30.♘xd7 available, followed by g5, and preventing 29...♗c8? because of 30.♘g6, since the rook is defended, and after 30...♖xe3 31.♕xe3 ♕d8 32.♘e7+ (not immediately 32.♕xc5? because Black would give perpetual check with 32...♕d1+) 32...♔f7 33.♘xc8, followed by 34.♕xc5, White would have the advantage.

29...♗c8 30.♕c4+

With the bishop now located more passively, and with the knight embedded on g6, Fischer now agrees to the exchange of rooks.

30...♔h7 31.♘g6 ♖xe2 32.♕xe2



32...♗d7?

“Like many of the American’s other opponents, Unzicker cracks under the prolonged pressure!,” commented Kasparov.

It’s curious that I noticed the same thing happening with Magnus Carlsen’s opponents, when I was writing my books about it.

In any case this is the decisive mistake; instead, the exposure of the white king could be exploited with 32...♕d6!, and White’s winning chances would be more debatable.

For example, the most direct approach 33.♕e8 ♕g3+ 34.♔f1 ♕d3+! 35.♔g2 (not 35.♕e2? due to 35...♗xf5!) 35...♕d5+ 36.♔f2, and here Black can play the surprising 36...♗xf5!, since after 37.♘f8+ ♔g8 38.♘e6+ ♔h7 39.gxf5 ♕d2+ Black has a draw by perpetual check.

There are other lines, of which the most promising is possibly 33.♘e5!, but here Black can activate his bishop with 33...b6, which 34.♕e4?! fails to prevent due to 34...♗b7!, but instead White can try 34.♔f2!, intending 35.♔g3 and perhaps ♔f4, with the idea of breaking with g5 at an opportune moment; the white king is surprisingly well protected by his two pieces, despite having all his pawns advanced.

Exercise: How did Fischer punish Black for his mistake?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

33.♕e7!

Forcing an ending of knight against bishop which, despite the position being an open one, is winning for White, because his kingside pawn majority is very strong, and the black king is imprisoned and can’t easily collaborate with the defence.

33...♕xe7 34.♘xe7 g5

Black tries to bring the king into play and defend against the threat of 35.g5, or even 35.h5, leaving the black king unable to move.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

35.hxg5!

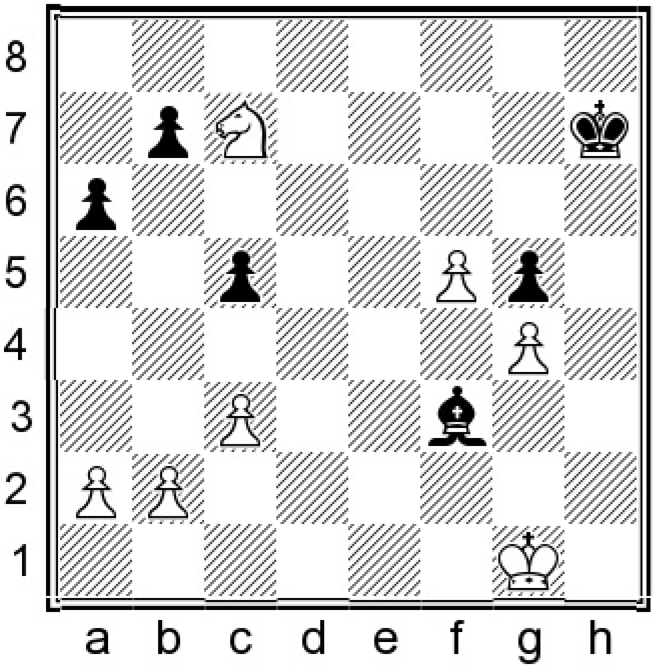
Rightly rejecting 35.fxg6+? ♔g7, when White is unable to keep the extra pawn, the black king is activated, and there is no way for White to win.

The great and destructive mobility that the white knight now displays is quite remarkable. One of the reasons for this is the remote location of the black king; with the kings in “normal” positions the situation would be very different.

35...hxg5 36.♘d5 ♗c6

The pawn on f5, which is now passed, prevents Black from activating his king; if 36...♔g7 then 37.♘xc7 ♔f6 38.♔f2 ♔e5 39.c4 and now 39...♔d4? isn’t possible, because of 40.f6.

37.♘xc7 ♗f3



It appears that the vital pawn on g4 can’t be defended, but White prevails with a manoeuvre of pinpoint accuracy and great beauty.

Exercise: How does this manoeuvre begin?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

38.♘e8!

Indirectly defending the g4-pawn and gaining time for White to reorganise the defence.

38...♔h6

Exercise (simple): How does the winning manoeuvre continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

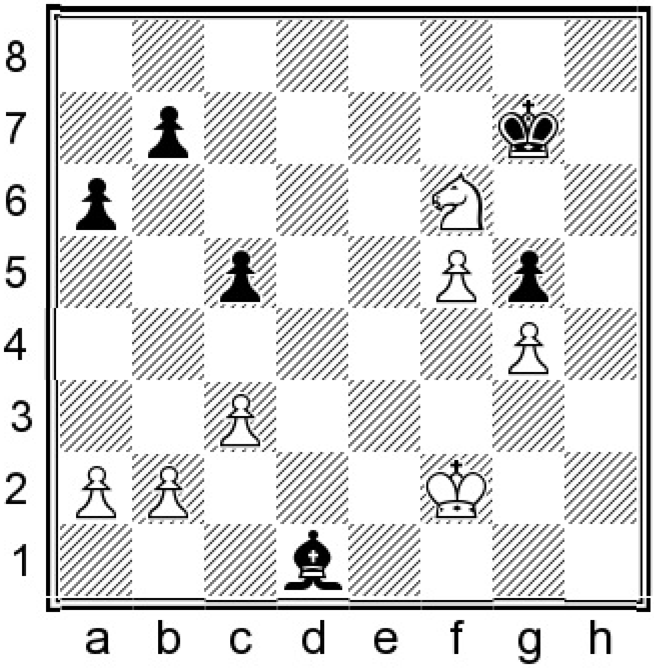
39.♘f6!

Gaining a vital tempo for the defence of the g4-pawn.

39...♔g7 40.♔f2!

Gaining another tempo.

40...♗d1



Exercise: How did Fischer strike the final blow?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

41.♘d7!

The point is that 41...♗xg4 loses to 42.f6+ ♔g8 43.f7+!, and wins the bishop, which means that the white king has time to defend the all-important g4-pawn.

41...c4 42.♔g3

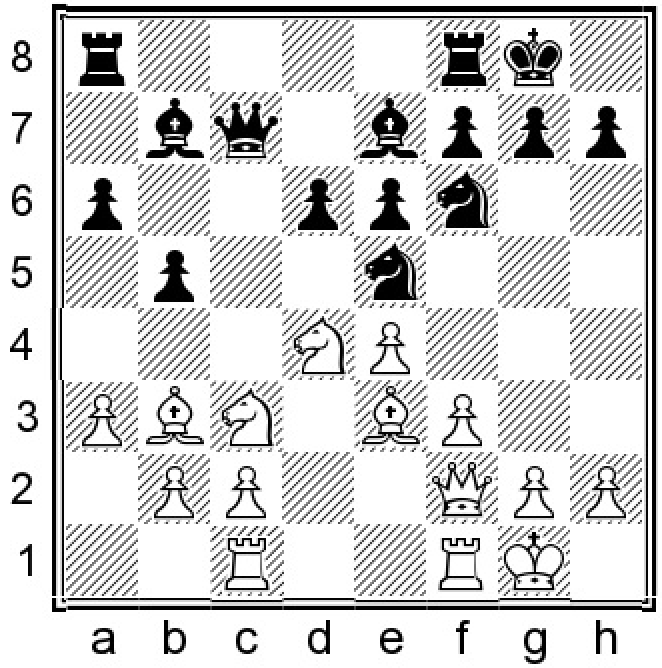
1–0

Game 47

The birth of a typical plan

Before we look at the main game, let's recall one of Fischer's wins which didn't have as much impact.

Julio García Soruco
Robert Fischer
Havana Olympiad, Preliminary Group C, 1966



Black to play

White's handling of Fischer's favorite line against the Najdorf, 6.♗c4, was not aggressive enough and Black has no problems.

But what to play now? One reasonable idea would be bring the rooks into play, with 14...♖fe8, defusing a possible ♗xe6,

or with 14...♖ac8, after evaluating that the position after 15.♘xe6 fxe6 16.♗xe6+ ♔h8 is good for Black,

or, if this doesn't seem convincing, Black could play 14...♘c4; so there is more than one pleasant "normal" option to consider.

But Fischer had an original and profound idea.

14...♔h8!

This inoffensive-looking move is the start of a plan which later had a great impact on the treatment of the structure Maroczy.

15.♘ce2

Now Black could already take advantage of this knight's retreat from c3 by playing 15...d5 under favourable conditions, achieving a good position after 16.exd5 ♘xd5, but instead he proceeds with his idea.

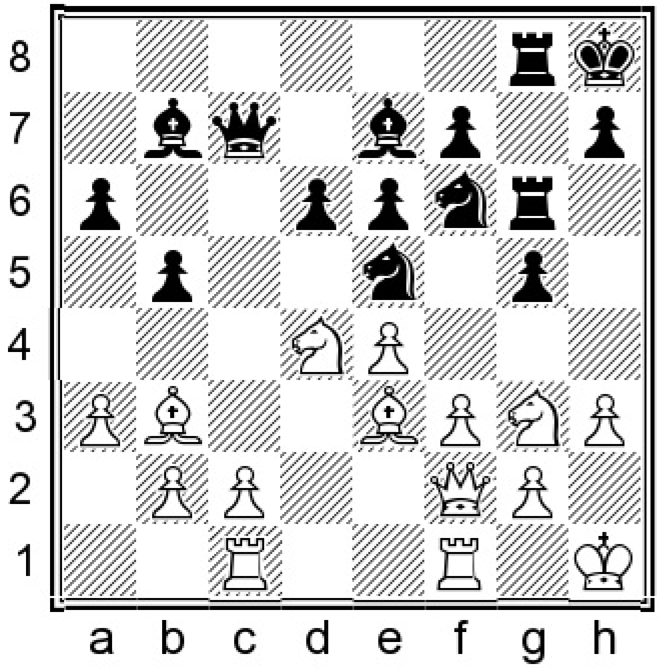
15...♖g8! 16.♔h1

And now comes the point.

16...g5!

A very unusual plan in the Sicilian, and thanks to White’s passive setup on the kingside, Black takes the initiative on the kingside.

17.h3 ♖g6 18.♘g3 ♖ag8



As usual with Fischer, his pieces are all placed harmoniously and working together. The plan is to break on g4, with a very strong attack; also in the air is the d5-break, to open the long light-squared diagonal in Black’s favour.

19.♘xe6?

The white position is inferior; this combination is unsound and hastens the end.

19...fxe6 20.♗xe6 ♘xe4! 21.♘xe4 ♖xe6

0–1

Robert Fischer
Ulf Andersson
Larsen’s Opening [A01]

1.b3

Fischer once again plays Larsen’s Opening, which made its debut in his repertoire in the game against Tukmakov. This time his opponent is the Swede Ulf Andersson, then nineteen years old.

This game was played a few days after the Siegen Olympiad.

1...e5 2.♗b2 ♘c6 3.c4 ♘f6 4.e3 ♗e7

Tigran Petrosian recommended 4...g6 here, although now 5.♘f3 is possible, and after 5...d6 (5...e4? 6.♘g5) 6.d4 the game takes another direction.

5.a3

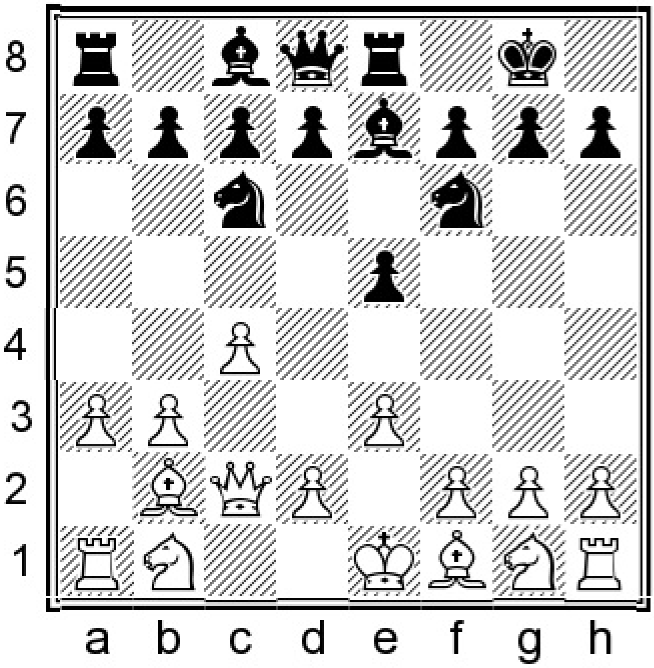
If 5.♘f3? then 5...e4.

5...0-0 6.♕c2

More precise than 6.d3, which we saw against Tukmakov.

6...♖e8

Petrosian’s recommendation of 4...g6 is based on the course of the game Petrosian - Sosonko, Tilburg 1981, which continued 6...d5 7.cxd5 ♘xd5 8.♘f3 ♗f6 9.d3 g6 10.♘bd2 ♗g7, where Black took two extra tempi to play ...g6 and ...♗g7.



Exercise: What did Fischer play here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

7.d3!

Once again showing respect for Black’s e5-pawn; not immediately 7.♘f3?!, because it allows 7...e4! 8.♘g5 h6! 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♕xe4 ♗xa3 and against the surprising resource 11.♗f6!? Black has the calm 11...♗e7!.

7...♗f8 8.♘f3 a5

The alternative was the immediate 8...d5.

9.♗e2 d5 10.cxd5 ♘xd5

“For the moment Andersson plays logically: the position is a ‘Scheveningen’ with reversed colours.” (Kasparov).

11.♘bd2

White has adopted what subsequently came to be known as the “Hedgehog setup,” which is frequently seen with colours reversed against the English Opening as well as in some lines of the Sicilian Defence and even in the Nimzo-Indian Defence.

The fundamental difference is that here there is a black pawn on c7 rather than c5, so Black doesn’t have a “Maroczy” structure,” which means he has less control of the d4-square.

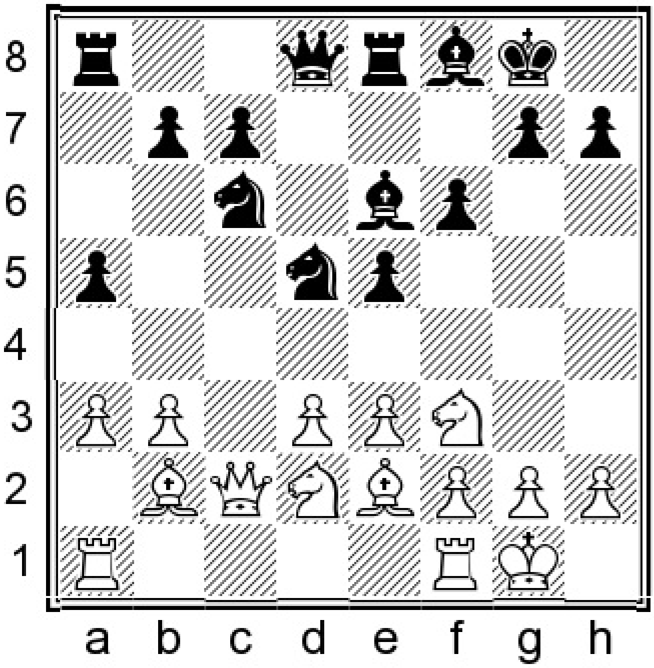
11...f6

Defending e5, in order to be able to play ...♗e6.

As in similar lines of the Sicilian, manoeuvring the queen to g6 with 11...♕f6 or 11...♕d6, followed by ...♕g6, was interesting.

Generally the queen goes to g6 (or g3, with White) from e8, but here it’s possible to benefit from the fact the bishop isn’t on e6 (to support the d5-knight) and the third rank is clear.

12.0-0 ♗e6



Exercise: What plan did Fischer choose now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13.♔h1!

Was it easy for you to find it? Fischer prepares the manoeuvre that he used against García Soruco.

The standard move 13.♖fd1 was possible, but the other natural move 13.♖ac1 is less convincing due to 13...a4!, and if 14.bxa4 then 14...♘b6, while 14.b4 allows 14...♘dxb4! 15.axb4 ♘xb4, or 14...♗xb4!, e.g. 15.axb4 ♘dxb4 16.♕b1, and Black can exploit the absence of the rook from a1 to lend power to his pawn with 16...a3 and 17...a2; Black emerges in good shape from the complications with both sacrifices and White is rather spoilt for choice.

Concerning Fischer's move, Kasparov wrote: "This mysterious move is the start of a bold, innovatory and far from obvious plan."

However, we already have a notion of what it is.

Question: Why not 13.d4? Generally this is a good freeing move with colours reversed. Isn't it good here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The current engines also like 13.d4, and after 13...exd4 14.♘xd4 ♘xd4 15.♗xd4 White is slightly better, "...but that which is suitable for equality with Black is not always good when playing for a win with White." (Kasparov).

13...♕d7

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

14.♖g1!

We're not surprised, are we? It's notable that, as with the previous move, the engines of early 2021 don't regards this manoeuvre with any enthusiasm and instead prefer the "normal" 14.♖fd1.

14...♖ad8 15.♘e4

As usual with Fischer, he optimises the deployment of his forces before taking concrete measures. Here he centralises this knight first of all, since Black is in no position to expel the knight with ...f5, as both 16.♘c5 and 16.♘eg5 are favourable to White.

15...♕f7

This is also the move preferred by the current engines, planning to put pressure on the b3-pawn after retreating the knight from d5; it's a reasonable move, but it doesn't cause White any difficulties.

Kasparov pointed out that it wasn't simple to discover the best way to counter White's plan, ruling out 15...h5 due to 16.h3.

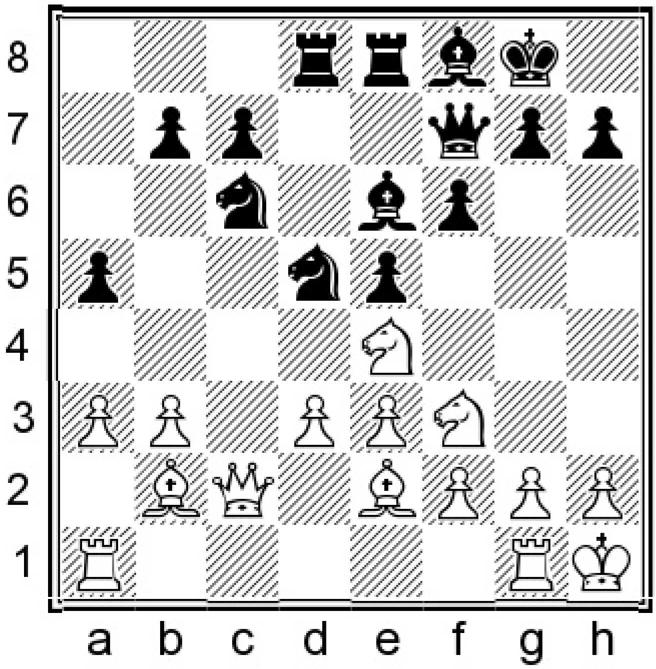
Question: But was White really threatening 16.g4? Or did it require a preparatory move. Because with his queen on d7, after 16.g4 Black could take the pawn, couldn't he?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: White's idea is clear; the task is to calculate whether the tactical complications allow him to play 16.g4 under favourable conditions.

If Black plays a move such as 15...♔h8, moving off the g-file, White could make "normal" preparatory moves, such as 16.♖ac1 and 16.♘c5, but he could also continue immediately with his plan by playing 16.g4!, since after 16...♗xg4 17.♖xg4! ♕xg4 18.♘xe5 ♕e6 19.♗g4 ♕g8 (or 19...♕e7)

20.♘xc6 bxc6 21.♗h5 (slightly more precise than 21.♖g1 ♘e7), followed by 22.♖g1, with compensation for the exchange; the b2-bishop is very strong and all the white pieces are applying pressure on Black's kingside.



Exercise: Is it appropriate to make another preparatory move? How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16.g4!

No, no further preparation is necessary. Fischer continues with the plan he has begun, since with Black's queen on f7, he can't even play 16...♗xg4 now.

16...g6?!

"An unforced weakening!" (Kasparov).

After this move, for the first time in the game the engines' faith in Black's position begins to waver. Here 16...♘b6 17.♘fd2 ♗d5 has been recommended, and this is an improvement, but White would still have continued with his idea.

Exercise (simple): How does White's idea proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17.♖g3!

This move isn't difficult to find either; Fischer pursues his now familiar and crystal-clear plan.

17...♗g7

Exercise (simple): What now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18.♖ag1!

As we saw in García Soruco - Fischer, and as is usually the case in Fischer's play, before taking any concrete measures, the last piece is also activated.

18...♘b6

Kasparov describes Black's feelings in this way: "Finding himself in a dangerous position, Black no longer knows what to do."

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer reply?

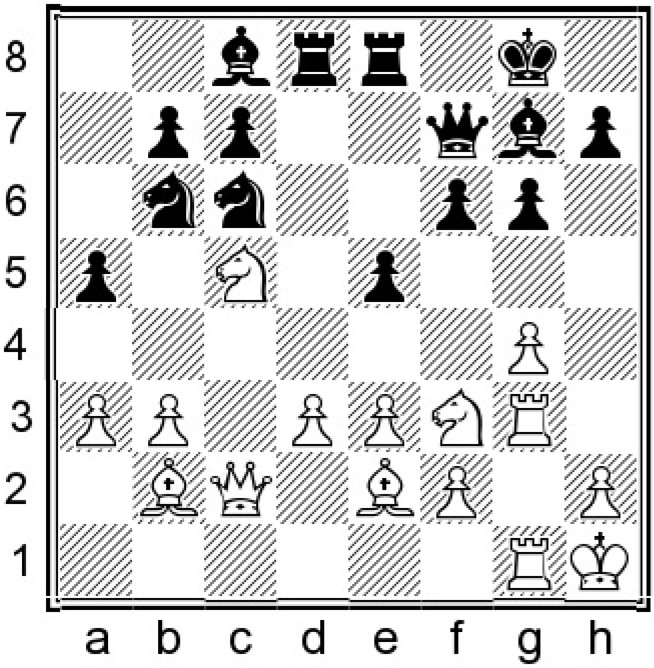
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19.♘c5!

Of course. He defends his attacked pawn with a knight move which is more active than dropping back to d2.

19...♗c8



Now White’s attack needs a new boost.

Exercise: How did Fischer proceed with his offensive?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20.♘h4!

Another unexpected move; 20.h4 was an alternative but Fischer’s move adds more dynamism to the position.

“Another pretty manoeuvre: the knight impends over Black’s position, threatening a possible sacrifice on g6 or a leap to f5.” (Kasparov).

As we shall see, there are other ideas behind it, such as a timely f4-break.

20...♘d7?!

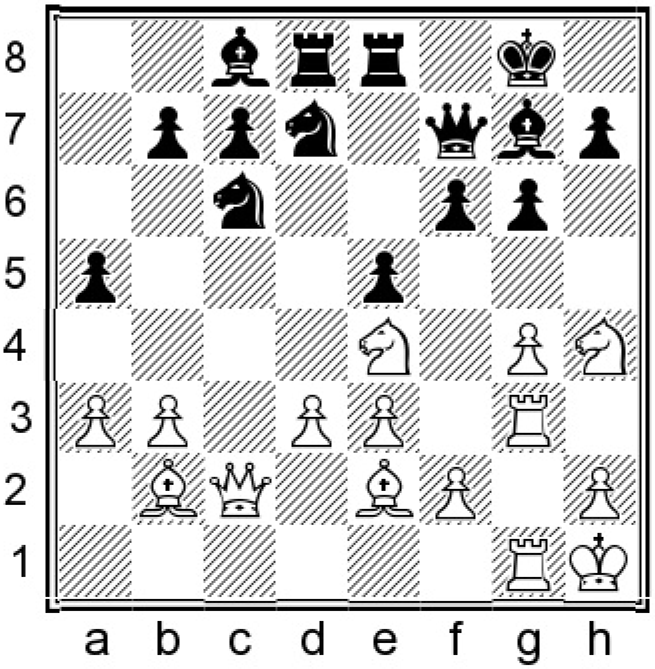
This is the decisive error, according to Kasparov, although it’s hard to see a really effective defence.

Here’s a line to illustrate the strength of the white offensive: after 20...♗f8 White can play 21.♘e4, lending more force to the g5-advance, and if 21...♘d5 White can play 22.g5! f5 23.♘f6+ ♘xf6 24.gxf6, with a winning attack, since if 24...♗e6 then 25.♘xg6! is decisive, while if e.g. 24...f4 the quickest way is 25.♖xg6+! hxg6 26.♗h5 (even stronger than 26.♘xg6 ♔h7 27.d4!), and the black position collapses.

20...♖d5 has been recommended, with the idea of answering 21.♗f3 with the exchange sacrifice 21...♖xc5! 22.♕xc5 ♕xb3, with reasonable compensation.

However, 21.♘e4 seems stronger and then after 21...♖b5, which is the indicated defensive resource, White can accelerate his offensive with 22.b4!, and after 22...axb4 23.g5! White's attack is unstoppable, e.g. 23...b3 24.♕c1 f5 25.♘f6+ ♔f8 (in the event of 25...♗xf6 26.gxf6 a rapid ♘xg6 would follow, while if 25...♔h8 then 26.♘xg6+! ♕xg6 27.♗h5 wins) 26.d4! ♖a5 27.♘xh7+ ♔e7 28.♘f6 ♖h8 29.♘f3, and the position of the black king is pitiful.

21.♘e4



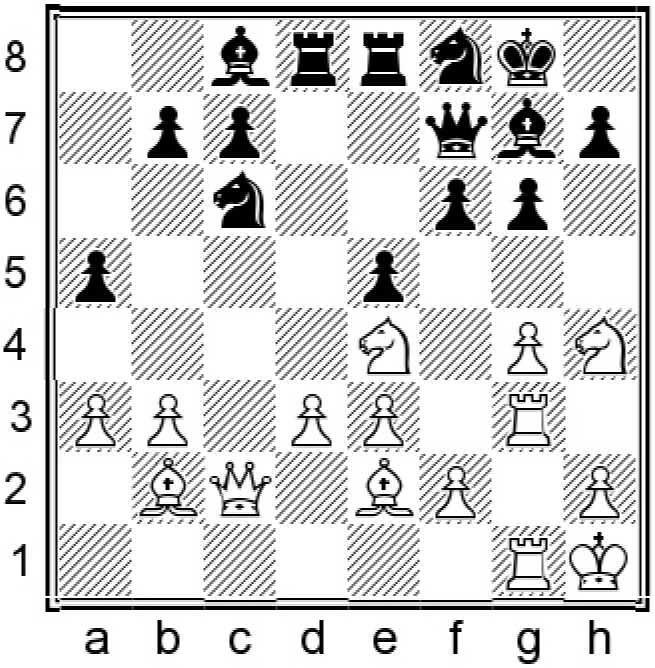
Kasparov pointed out the surprising paradox of this position; the board is full of pieces, there is hardly any contact between the two sides and White has not yet ventured beyond the fourth rank, yet White has an almost winning position.

21...♘f8

After this move White continues to make progress, but by now this is inevitable; if 21...♘b6 then White can play the logical 22.g5! fxg5 (22...f5 fails to 23.♘f6+ ♗xf6 24.gxf6, followed a crushing ♘xg6!) 23.♘xg5 ♕e7, and now comes another strong pawn move, opening further breaches in the black position: 24.d4! and if 24...exd4 then 25.♘xg6! is decisive, while after 24...♖d6 the most logical continuation is to open lines with 25.dxe5, which leads to an unstoppable attack, although 25.♗d3! also works, followed by ♘xg6!, with a winning attack.

If 21...♔h8 White opens lines once again with 22.d4!, and after 22...exd4 23.♗c4 Black's best try, although insufficient, is possibly 23...♖e6, because after 23...♕f8 24.♖h3 ♘e7 25.♗xd4 it is clear that Black can't halt the attack, for instance Kasparov indicated 25...b6 26.♗e6 ♗b7 27.f3 ♗xe4 28.♕xe4, "and the threat of ♘xg6+ gives a White a decisive attack" (Kasparov). In this line, the move 24.♖h3 shows us why Fischer didn’t hurry to play h4.

If, instead of 24...♘e7 Black defends with 24...♗h6, then 25.exd4 and all the white pieces are attacking, for instance if 25...♘b6 then 26.d5 wins, as indicated by Kasparov, but White can also play 26.♘xg6+! hxg6 27.♗c1 g5 28.♘xg5! fxg5 29.♕g6. That White is able to sacrifice two pieces to open lines is clear evidence of the power of the white pieces operating from their own territory, in combination with the necessary pawn breaks.



Exercise: What powerful blow did Fischer strike now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22.♘f5!

Fulfilling the idea initiated with 20.♘h4!; the knight is immune, as after 22...gxf5 23.gxf5 White will capture on g7, when giving up the queen for the two rooks fails to relieve the pressure, as White can continue with ♘g3 and f4.

22...♗xf5 23.gxf5 g5, trying to close the position, is no better due to 24.♘xg5!, while 23...♘e7 is punished with 24.fxg6 hxg6 25.d4!.

22...♗e6 23.♘c5!

Once again defending b3 in the most active way.

23...♘e7?!

Here 23...♗c8 was more tenacious, when it's appropriate for White to keep manoeuvring advantageously with 24.h4, although it's also possible to sharpen the struggle with 24.d4!, as Kasparov indicates, and after 24...exd4 25.♗c4 ♘e6 26.exd4 the e-file opens up in White's favour; then if 26...♔h8 the simple 27.♘e4 is good, although the engines also see an advantage to White after 27.d5 and 27.♖e3.

It's not really strange that the tactical complications should favour White if, instead of 26...♔h8, Black chooses 26...b5; White can play 27.♗xb5 ♘exd4 28.♘xd4 ♘xd4 29.♗xe8 ♕xe8 (or 29...♕d5+ 30.♕e4 ♕xc5 31.♗xd4, with material advantage) 30.♕c4+ ♘e6 31.♖e3, and wins.

Returning to 23...♗c8 24.d4!, if Black plays 24...♘e6 then 25.♘xg7 is good, but it seems stronger to add wood to the fire with 25.♗c4!, with the idea of 26.g5 fxg5 27.♘xg7.

Exercise: What now? After 23...♘e7, has the moment come to take concrete measures, or should White continue to manoeuvre?

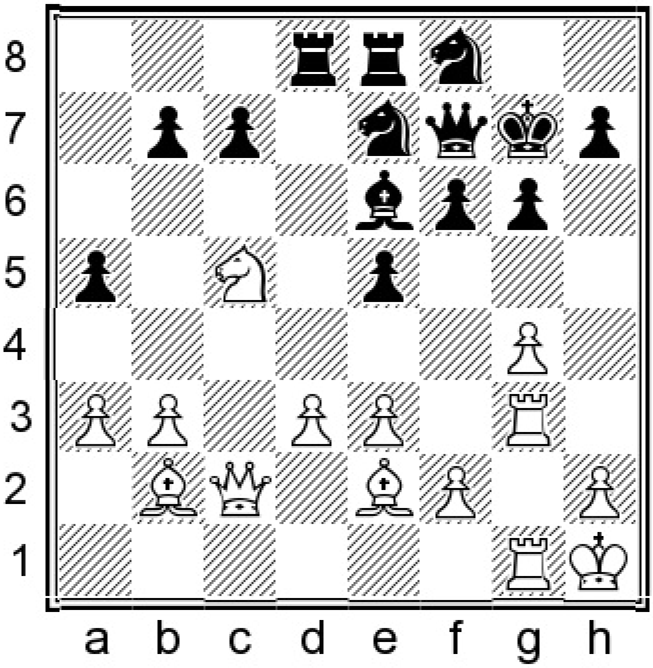
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24.♘xg7!

It's time for action! There's no need for any further manoeuvring; this exchange is made with a specific idea behind it.

24...♔xg7



Exercise (simple): What’s the follow-up to the previous move?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

25.g5!

As we have already seen, once the g7-bishop has been eliminated, White’s bishop on b2 also joins the party, dominating the dark squares.

25...♘f5 26.♖f3!

Maintaining the pressure; 26.♘xe6 was also good, but there’s no hurry; the knight can still return powerfully to e4.

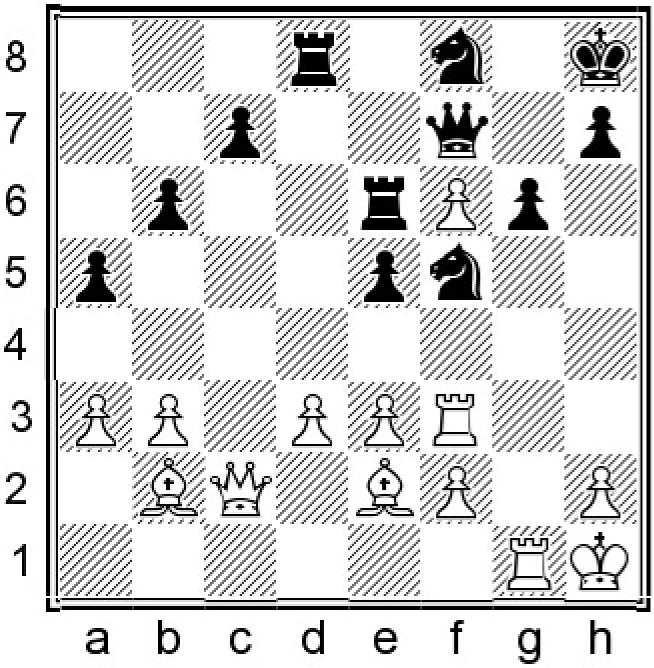
26...b6

The black position also collapses after 26...♗d5, which seems the most tenacious defensive try; White can play 27.e4 b6 28.♘a6 ♗xb3 29.♕c1 ♘d4 30.♖xf6, e.g. 30...♕d7 31.♗xd4 exd4 (or 31...♕xd4 32.♕xc7+ and 33.♕xb6) 32.♖c6!, followed by ♖xc7, with an overwhelming advantage.

27.gxf6+ ♔h8

After 27...♕xf6 then 28.♘e4 wins.

28.♘xe6 ♖xe6



Exercise: How did Fischer give a fresh boost to his attack?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

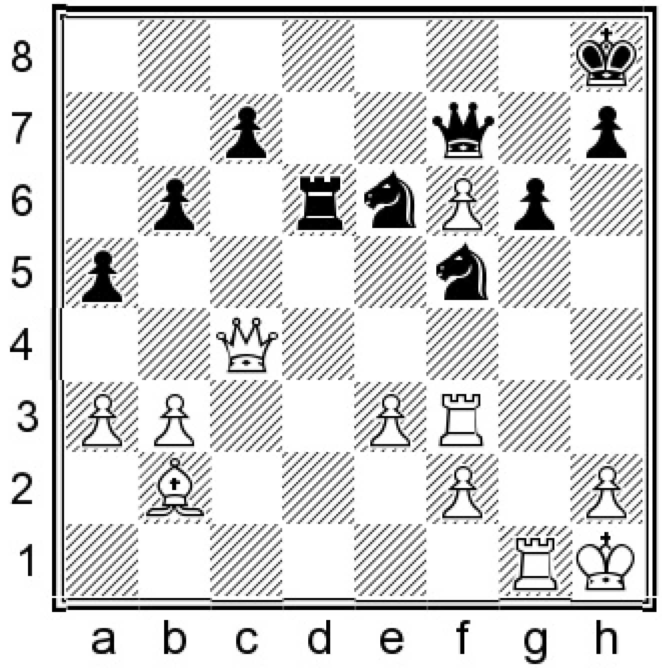
29.d4!

Finally the typical break! The white bishop pair is activated.

29...exd4 30.♗c4 d3

It's not possible to keep the long diagonal closed with 30...c5, when 31.exd4 would be good, but White also has the more crushing line 31.♖xf5! gxf5 32.♕xf5 (or 32.exd4 cxd4 33.♕xf5) 32...b5 33.♖g7! ♖xf6 34.♗xf7 ♔xg7 (34...♖xf5 allows mate) 35.♕xc5 ♔xf7 36.♗xd4, and wins (Kasparov).

31.♗xd3 ♖xd3 32.♕xd3 ♖d6 33.♕c4 ♘e6



Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

34.♗e5!

Having won the exchange there are now several good moves; the engines’ preference is 34.♖xf5! gxf5 35.♖g7 ♖d1+ (or 35...♕f8 36.♕xe6 ♖xe6 37.f7) 36.♔g2 ♕e8 37.♖g3 ♕a8+ (37...♕f7 38.♕xe6) 38.♔h3 ♘g5+ 39.♖xg5 ♕f3+ 40.♖g3 ♕h5+ 41.♔g2, and the checks come to an end.

34...♖d8 35.h4

There are many ways to win now. Fischer is in no hurry and opts to weaken the black king even more.

35...♘d6 36.♕g4 ♘f8 37.h5 ♘e8 38.e4

Preventing ...♕d5+.

38...♖d2 39.♖h3 ♔g8 40.hxg6 ♘xg6 41.f4 ♔f8 42.♕g5 ♘d6 43.♗xd6+

“Deep strategy!,” wrote Kasparov.

1–0

Game 48

Palma de Mallorca Interzonal 1970

Kasparov described the role of the USCF Executive Director Edmund “Ed” Edmondson (New York, 1930 – Honolulu, 1982) in the following way: “... he became a genuine guardian angel [for Fischer]: he defended his financial interests, achieved favourable playing conditions, took it upon himself to resolve any organizational questions, dispelled doubts, smoothed conflicts, and was able to tune up Fischer for a fight or calm him at difficult moments...”

After Edmondson’s hard work, Fischer finally travelled to Mallorca, and to prevent what happened in Sousse from happening again, Edmondson accompanied Fischer throughout the tournament, continuing with the work described by Kasparov and resolving even more conflicts, caused either by the sabbath that Fischer had to observe, or even by noise that disturbed him.

On one occasion, when he was playing the Filipino player Naranja, a very irritated Fischer turned to Edmondson because a door was being closed too noisily. Edmondson solved the problem ... by opening and closing the door himself, so that the noise did not distract Fischer.

It goes without saying that it was very difficult to find somebody like that, convinced that even such humiliating work was worthwhile, all for altruistic reasons.

At the board, Fischer began with a draw with the German Hübner, and then went on to win five consecutive games, playing beautifully and overwhelmingly.

Let’s look at his first win in the tournament.

Vasily Smyslov
Robert Fischer
English Opening [A36]
Palma de Mallorca Interzonal (2), 10.11.1970

1.c4 g6 2.♘c3 ♗g7 3.g3 c5 4.♗g2 ♘c6 5.b3

In the second game of the USSR – Rest of the World Match in Belgrade, which marked Fischer’s return to competition, Petrosian preferred 5.♘f3 and play continued 5...e6! (the exclamation mark is Fischer’s) 6.0-0 ♘ge7 7.d3 0-0 8.♗d2 d5, and Fischer ending up winning a complex endgame.

5...e6 6.♗b2

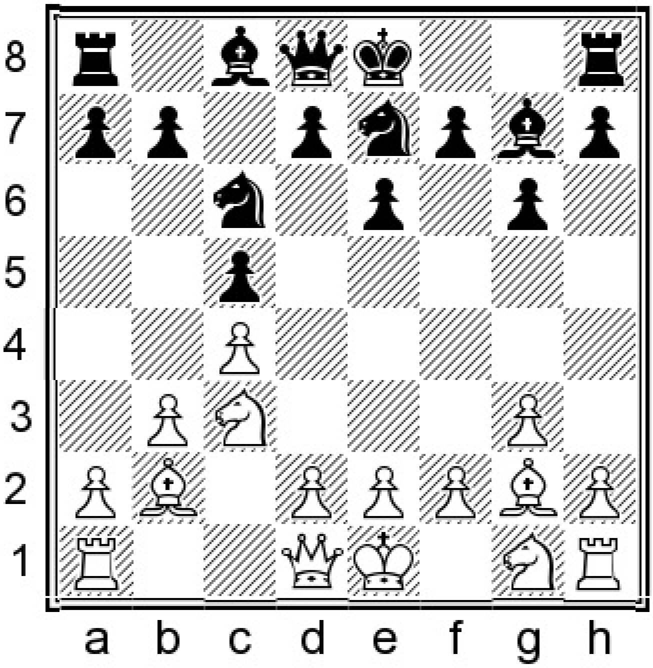
Question: This line is only rarely played by White, am I right?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Correct, although Smyslov had a certain fondness for it.

In the 1970s Larsen twice tried to exploit his better structure by playing 6.♗xc6, but without success; more recently some players have tried 6.♗a3, trying to force ...d6, and hinder or delay Black from playing ...d5, as we saw that Fischer played.

6...♘ge7



7.♘a4?!

Kasparov commented that this passive manoeuvre disrupts the harmony of the white pieces and is a strange decision on Smyslov's part.

> **Question:** I can't really understand this yet, but if this is so obvious to Kasparov, how come Smyslov played this way?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Smyslov had his own ideas and believed that the idea of exchanging the dark-squared bishops would be good for White; he tried to prove this on more than one occasion, but with little success.

This exchange had already been employed by Smyslov against Tal in Moscow 1964, who commented: "I do not consider that Black's king's bishop is such a dangerous enemy. The cost of its exchange – two tempi – allows Black to obtain a comfortable position without difficulty."

In the event of 7.♘f3 the play would transpose to a game Smyslov had played against Fischer in Buenos Aires 1970, just a few months before, but after 7...0-0 8.♘a4, instead of taking with 8...♗xb2, followed by 9...d5, which, even though this was what Smyslov was seeking, seems satisfactory for

Black, Fischer preferred 8...e5!, leaving the knight misplaced on a4; play continued 9.0-0 (9.♘xc5? is unplayable, due to 9...e4 10.♗xg7 exf3 11.♗xf8 fxg2, and wins) 9...d6 10.e3 f5 11.d3 h6 12.♘e1 f4 13.♘c2 g5, Black stood very well, although the result was a draw.

A more recent try, with the same idea as Smyslov's, and seemingly preferable, was given its debut in Hort - Gulko, Niksic 1978, is 7.♕c1, defending the bishop, so that the knight will have better options than going to a4; then after 7...d6 White played 8.f4! - "A new and very interesting plan in this position. White hopes to exchange dark-squared bishops and create threats on the a1-h8 diagonal" (Gulko); the continuation was 8...0-0 9.♘e4 e5 10.fxe5 ♘xe5 11.♘f3, with a complicated struggle.

Hort's move (8.f4!) was also an improvement on Smyslov - Ivkov, Palma de Mallorca 1967, in which Smyslov played 8.h4, resulting in a quick draw.

7...♗xb2 8.♘xb2 0-0

"It is curious that the natural 8...b6 would immediately lead Black into difficulties after 9.d4! and if 9...cxd4 then 10.♘f3" (Tal).

9.e3

"9.♘f3 is more natural," according to Kasparov.

Question: It's easy to agree with that, isn't it?

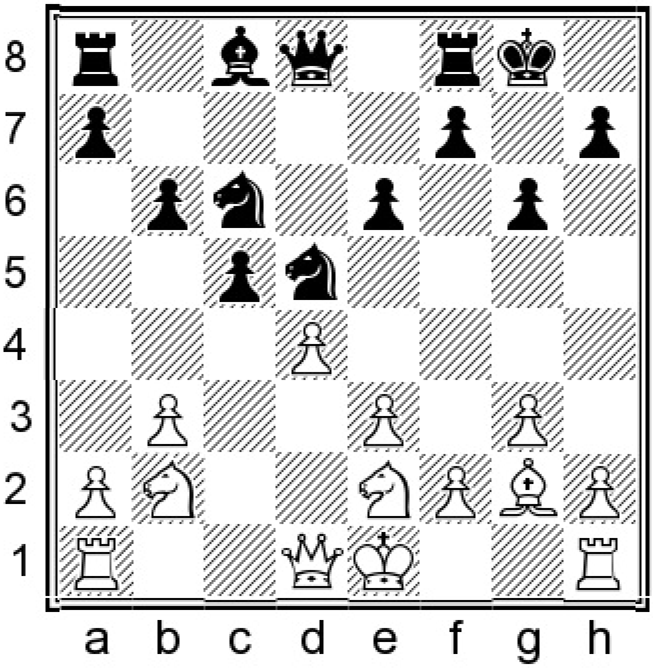
Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes, but Smyslov intends to improve on his game against Tal by developing the king's knight to e2, we will see it in the next comment.

9...d5 10.cxd5

Against Tal, Smyslov played 10.♘f3, when Tal's reply 10...♘f5! was important, in order to prevent the advance d2-d4 under favourable conditions, because "after 10...b6 11.0-0 ♗b7 12.d4 an almost symmetrical position would arise, in which, however, the difference in the positions of the knights would be in White's favour. After exchanges in the centre one knight would post itself on c4 and the other on d4." (Tal).

10...♘xd5 11.♘e2 b6 12.d4?!



This is what White was seeking; he wanted to play d4 before Black could prevent it. Now the threat is to take on c5.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

12...♗a6!

It’s not enough to have a good idea; it’s essential that the tactics support it. With this pawn sacrifice the problems begin for White’s development.

The closed character of the position might lead us to believe the White’s delay in castling is unimportant. Fischer is trying to demonstrate that in this case it is important.

13.dxc5

13.0-0? wasn’t possible due to 13...cxd4 14.exd4 ♗xe2, followed by 15...♘xd4.

Smyslov’s move doesn’t leads to a good position for him, but there was already nothing fully satisfactory; if 13.♘c4, trying to castle as soon as possible, Black has 13...b5, forcing the knight to retreat, or perhaps even better, 13...♕f6, with the idea of ...♖fd8.

Interpolating 13.♖c1 ♖c8 hardly changes the situation.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13...♕f6!

It would seem that Smyslov didn’t see this strong intermediate move; as we mentioned earlier, tactical support is essential for an idea to be sound.

The queen attacks the knight on b2 and prepares ...♖fd8; what more can one ask? Well, the current engines slightly prefer the “unhuman” move13...♕e7.

This rather indicates that, going back, instead of 12.d4 it was better to play 12.0-0 ♗a6 13.♘c4, although this would imply giving up the idea of playing d4 advantageously and would put in doubt White’s entire opening plan.

14.♘c4

If 14.♘d4?, trying close the d-file, then 14...♖ad8! is very strong, e.g. 15.♘c4 bxc5 16.♘xc6 ♕c3+ 17.♔f1 ♗xc4+ 18.bxc4 ♘xe3+ 19.fxe3 ♖xd1+ 20.♖xd1 ♕xe3, with a winning advantage.

The immediate 14...bxc5! also works, since after 15.♘xc6 ♕xb2 16.♖b1 ♕f6 Black has a big advantage, since there is no good solution to the problem of White’s king stuck in the centre.

Exercise: There are several attractive moves now; what do you think Fischer chose?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

14...♘c3!

The most crystalline solution; the following exchange clarifies the position. Black opens the d-file and his queen invades White’s territory, preventing castling.

15.♘xc3

In the event of 15.♕c1 there would follow 15...♘xe2 16.♔xe2 ♖ac8!, with the idea of 17...♘e5 or 17...♘a5, and after 17.♖d1 ♘a5 18.♔f1 ♖xc5, Black wins a pawn without compensation, while even worse is 17.cxb6 ♘e5, with a winning initiative, for example if 18.b7 then Black wins with, among other things, 18...♘xc4 19.bxc8=♕ ♖xc8 20.bxc4 ♖xc4.

15...♕xc3+ 16.♔f1

The game now follows a forced sequence.

16...♖fd8 17.♕c1 ♗xc4+ 18.bxc4 ♕d3+ 19.♔g1 ♖ac8

But now White has options.

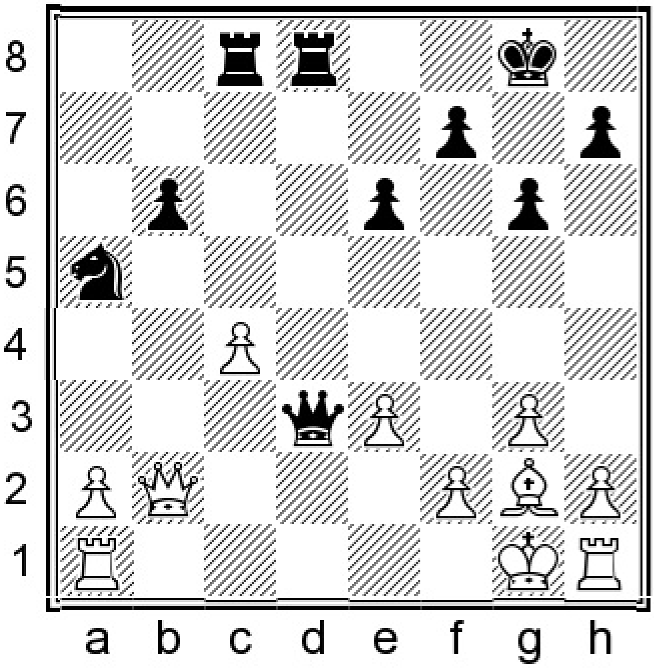
20.cxb6

After 20.h3 bxc5 “Black would have retained unpleasant pressure with level material” (Kasparov). The same can be said about 20.h4, which the engines prefer, but without showing any great enthusiasm.

20...axb6 21.♕b2

Once again improving the king with 21.h3 ♘e5 22.♔h2 was also to be considered, but Black would be playing with much the more active pieces and equal material after 22...♕f5! 23.♖f1 ♘xc4.

21...♘a5



22.h4

This is also the move preferred by the engines of early 2021. White clears h2 for his monarch and plans to bring his king’s rook into play via the h-file.

If 22.♗f1 then 22...♘xc4, with an obvious advantage to Black, who has all his pieces active.

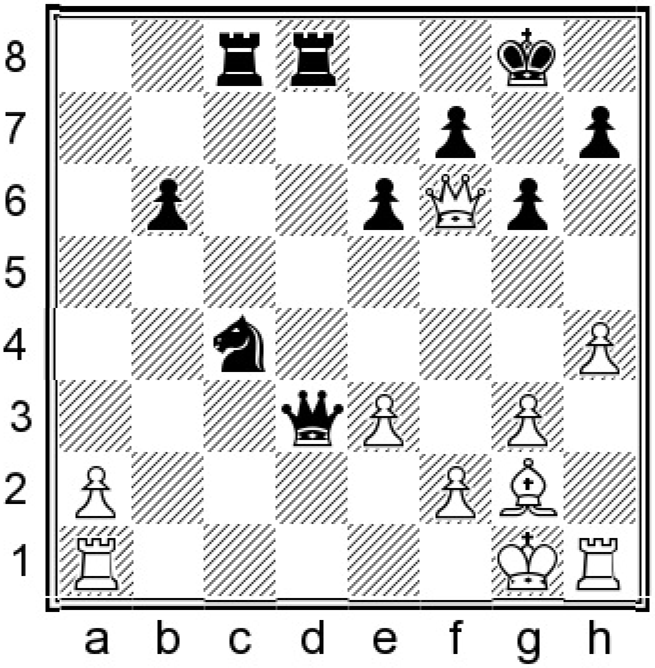
Vasiukov recommended 22.♕xb6, eliminating Black’s last queenside pawn, but Kasparov doesn’t believe that White would be able to defend the second rank adequately. Nevertheless this was perhaps White’s best practical chance. Black would respond with 22...♘xc4, and now the queen has several retreat squares; after for example 23.♕b1 ♕c3! 24.♕e1 ♖d2 25.♖c1 ♕b2 26.♖b1, seeking to expel the queen, Black would play 26...♕xa2 27.♖a1 ♕b2 28.♖b1 ♕f6, and the black pieces maintain their domination; if 29.♗f1 then 29...♘e5 wins.

Instead of 26.♖b1 it is no better to play 26.♗f1 ♘d6 27.♖xc8+ ♘xc8 28.a4, because the knight returns to the attack and the passed pawn is placed under control with 28...♘d6! 29.a5 ♘e4 30.a6 ♖xf2 (or 30...♕a2) 31.a7 ♕a2 and White has no defence, e.g. 32.♗d3 ♖g2+! 33.♔f1 ♖b2 34.♗xe4 ♕c4+ and ...♕xe4.

In the event of 22...♘xc4, 23.♕b3 Black can play 23...♕d2, and after 24.a4 Black can prepare an invasion with his rooks and at the same time control the passed pawn with e.g. 24...♘e5 25.h3 ♖c2 26.♖f1 ♖b2 27.♕a3 ♖c8, to go to c2, and now if 28.a5 then 28...♘c4, while if 28.♕e7 Black wins with 28...♖cc2 29.♕f6 ♕xe3!, with equal material now and an irresistible initiative.

There are other possible lines, of course, but in all cases the crucial factor is that White is playing a rook down and with a weak king.

22...♘xc4 23.♕f6



Exercise: What did Fischer play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23...♕f5!

Neutralising White’s threat of h5 with another Capablanca-like simplification.

This is better than 23...♖c5 24.♗e4! ♕d6 25.♔g2!, seeking to counterattack with 26.h5, with better practical chances than in the game.

Exercise: Why not immediately 25.h5?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Because of 25...♘xe3! 26.hxg6? ♕d1+! 27.♖xd1 ♖xd1+ 28.♔h2 ♖xh1+ 29.♔xh1 ♖c1+ 30.♔h2 ♘g4+.

24.♕xf5 gxf5 25.h5

To activate the rook with ♖h4; another idea was 25.♔h2 ♖d2 26.♖hf1, but after 26...♘a3! (controlling the b1-square, which seems better than 26...♘e5 27.♔g1 ♖cc2 28.e4 fxe4 29.♗xe4 ♖xa2 30.♖xa2 ♖xa2 31.♖b1, with drawing chances, as Kasparov pointed out) 27.♔g1 b5 28.e4 fxe4 29.♗xe4 ♖c4! 30.♗f3 ♖cc2, the white position remains very difficult.

25...♖d2 26.♖c1?

Giving up the a-pawn makes Black’s task easier.

It was more tenacious to bring the inactive h1-rook into the game, although this should not be good enough in the long run; after 26.♖h4 ♘e5 27.♖d4, Black could play 27...♖b2!, and there is no time for 28.a4 due to 28...♖cc2 29.♖f1 ♘g4.

Instead of 28.a4 it would be better to play 28.e4 fxe4, but after 29.♗xe4 f5, followed by 30...♖cc2, the white position contains too many weaknesses and is very difficult to defender.

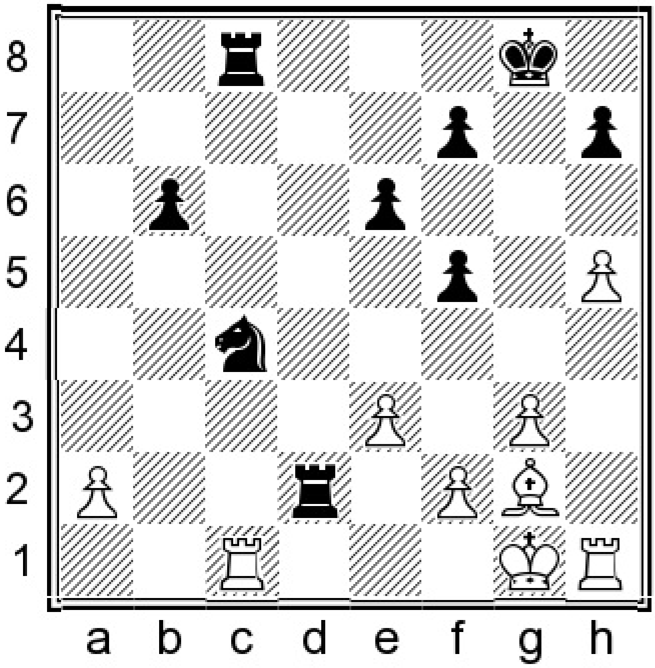
Exercise: Instead of 29.♗xe4 White can recapture with the rook; what would you play after 29.♖xe4?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The best move is 29...♖c5!, keeping the knight centralised for now, with the idea of ...♔g7, or if 30.h6, continuing with 30...♔f8-e7, while White would remain very passive.

29...♘d3?!, with the idea of ...♖cc2, would grant White more practical chances with 30.♖g4+ ♔f8 (if 30...♔h8 then also 31.h6) 31.h6 ♘xf2 32.♖g7, and the position becomes unnecessarily complicated.

Let’s get back to the game.



Exercise: How did Fischer reply to 26.♖c1?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

26...♖c5!

Neutralising the pin on the knight.

Fischer is looking for more than the advantage achievable with 26...♖xa2?! 27.♖h4 b5, for example 28.h6 ♔f8 29.e4! fxe4 30.♗xe4 f5 31.♗d3 ♔e7! 32.g4! (not 32.♗xc4? ♖a4!) 32...♔f6 and although Black has some advantage, it isn’t so clear after 33.gxf5 exf5 34.♖f4 ♖c5 35.♔h2, all the white pieces are in play.

27.♖h4

Exercise: What now?

Show/Hide Solution

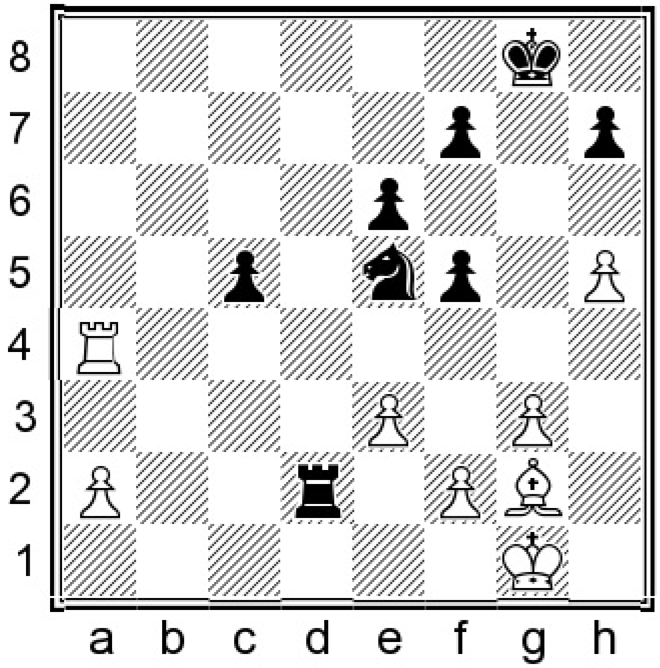
Answer:

27...♘e5!

You always have to stay alert; not 27...b5? because of 28.a4!.

28.♖xc5 bxc5 29.♖a4

If 29.a4 then, among other things, 29...♖d1+ 30.♔h2 ♘g4+ wins.



Exercise (simple): What did Fischer do now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29...c4

Of course, advancing his passed pawn, which is much stronger than White’s; now if 30.♖a3 then 30...♖c2!, preventing ♖c3, followed by 31...c3.

30.h6 ♔f8 31.♖a8+

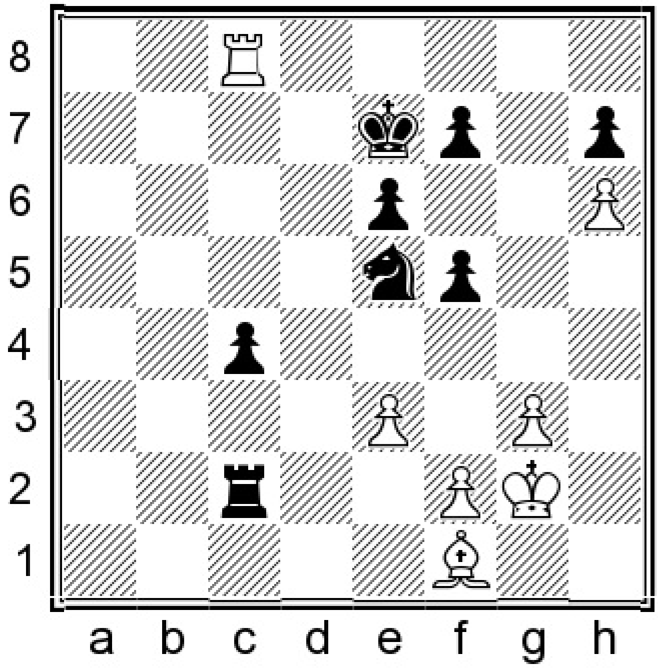
White is powerless; he can’t create threats and meanwhile Black’s active pieces, together with his passed pawn, will be decisive; if 31.♖a3 then, as before, Black plays 31...♖c2! and then 32...c3.

31...♔e7 32.♖c8

Once again, if 32.♖a3 then 32...♖c2; this attempt to post the rook behind the passed pawn will fail, but there was no good alternative.

32...♖xa2 33.♗f1 ♖c2 34.♔g2

34.f4? walks into mate after 34...♘f3+.



Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

34...♘g4

Winning even more material.

35.♔g1 ♖xf2 36.♗xc4

Of course if 36.♖xc4 then Black wins with 36...♖xf1+, followed by 37...♘xe3+.

36...♖f3 37.♔g2 ♖xe3

The rest is very simple.

38.♖h8 ♘xh6 39.♖xh7 ♘g4 40.♗b5 ♖b3 41.♗c6 ♖b2+ 42.♔g1 ♘e5 43.♗a8 ♖b8 44.♗h1

White resigned without waiting to see, for example, 44...♖b1+ 45.♔f2 ♘g4+ 46.♔e2 ♖b3.

0–1

Game 49

A crisis and a devastating final spurt

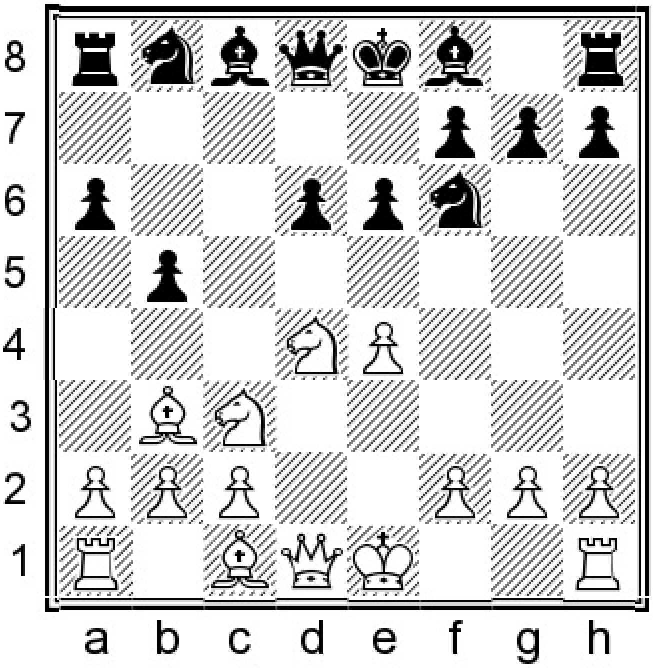
Following on the above-mentioned string of wins there came a crisis. Fischer was close to losing in several games, (I was in Buenos Aires and I well remember that the cables were saying, mistakenly, that Fischer had in fact lost some of those games), until he lost against Larsen and followed by a string of indifferent results. Then came his duel with Geller in the 12th round.

The Russian Geller was the tournament leader, he had White, and also had a far superior record against Fischer (+5 =2 –2). On move 7 he offered a draw. Fischer turned it down, and managed to win after a long endgame.

After that game everything changed; in the final eleven games he conceded only two draws and gained nine consecutive wins (including one by default, against Panno). Let’s now look at three of those wins.

Robert Fischer
Jorge Rubinetti
Sicilian Defence [B87]
Palma de Mallorca Interzonal (17), 02.12.1970

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e6 6.♗c4 a6 7.♗b3 b5



8.0-0

We are in terrain which was very familiar to Fischer, with both colours. Here he varies from 8.f4, which he played against Tal in Bled 1959, as we know. Fischer annotated this game in *My 60 Memorable Games*.

8...♗b7

The alternative is 8...♗e7, against which Fischer played both 9.f4 and the move which subsequently became more popular, 9.♕f3.

9.♖e1

Fischer varies from the pawn sacrifice 9.f4, which we saw in Game 14.

9...♘bd7

Exercise (simple): After playing 8...♗b7, it is a well-known blunder to play 9...♗e7 – why is that?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: It's because of the typical sacrifice 10.♗xe6!, and because g7 is unprotected White wins three pawns for the piece and the black king is weakened.

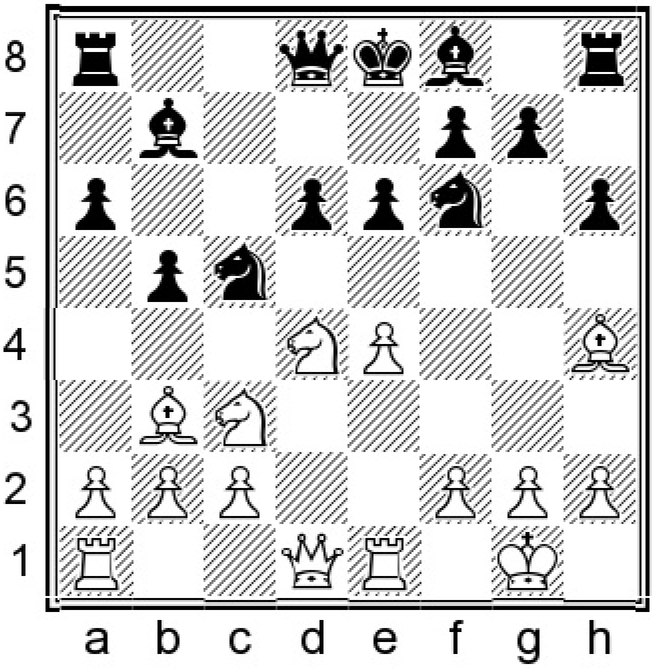
It is clear that Fischer had studied this variation in detail, because he had found an obscure Russian game Lipman - Zolotonos, played in Riga in 1968 and annotated it in his column for *Boys Life* magazine for August 1969; that game continued 9...b4? 10.♘d5!! exd5 11.♗a4+!! ♘bd7 12.exd5+ ♗e7 13.♘f5 and White won; the generous exclamation marks were awarded by Fischer.

10.♗g5! h6 11.♗h4

Subsequently the main move here became 11.♗xf6.

11...♘c5?

The correct continuation is 11...g5 12.♗g3 ♘e5.



With the move played, Black plans to exchange Fischer’s favourite piece, the strong bishop on b3.

Exercise: How did Fischer show that this was a mistake?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

12.♗d5!!

A beautiful move which places Black is in a very delicate position. At first sight, accepting the piece sacrifice doesn’t seem very dangerous, as the black king doesn’t suffer any immediate harassment. It requires a key move later for White to justify the offer.

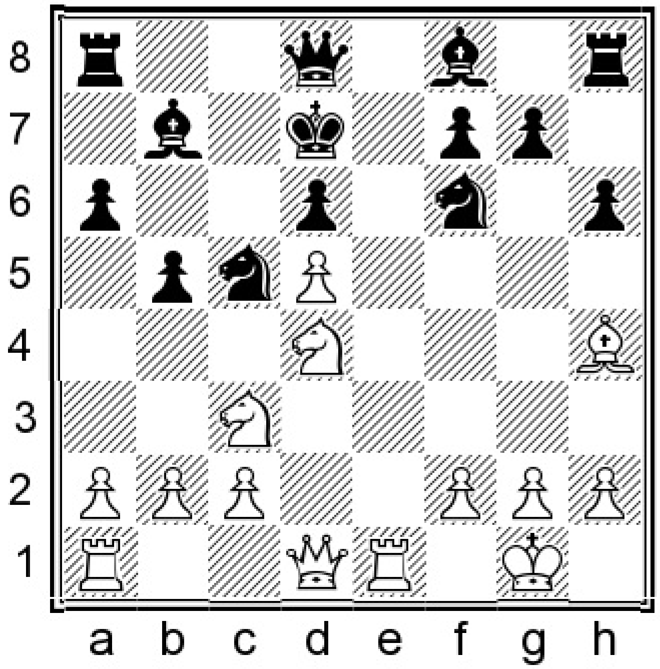
12...exd5

In the event of 12...♕c7 or 12...♕b6 White can play 13.♗xf6 gxf6 14.♕h5, with a big advantage, while if 12...b4 White has 13.♗xb7 ♘xb7 14.♘d5! exd5 15.exd5+ ♔d7 16.♘c6, also with great advantage to White.

The most tenacious defence (although still insufficient) would perhaps have been 12...♗e7, with the possible continuation 13.♗xb7 ♘xb7 14.♘c6 ♕c7 15.♘xe7 ♔xe7 (if 15...♕xe7 then 16.♘d5!) and now 16.f4, or perhaps 16.a4 b4 17.e5! dxe5 18.♕g4 g5 (against 19.♕xg7) 19.♕xb4+ ♘c5 20.♗g3 ♘d7 21.♖ad1, with advantage to White in both cases.

13.exd5+ ♔d7

Of course not 13...♗e7 due to 14.♗xf6 gxf6 15.♘f5.



At first glance, Black’s situation doesn’t seem too serious, as for now the king is in no danger because the centre is closed and White has only one pawn for the piece; Black is even threatening 14...g5 and capturing on d5.

But general considerations are trumped by tactics; after White’s next move everything becomes clear.

Exercise: How can White show that in fact his sacrifice is devastating?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

14.b4!

The problem for Black is that the knight has no good retreat; what follows is forced, and everything changes.

14...♘a4 15.♘xa4 bxa4

Exercise (simple): How can White now gain a crushing position?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16.c4

And all is revealed; White now wins a second pawn, the centre will cease to be closed when White breaks with c4-c5 and the safety of the black king will evaporate.

Question: What a dramatic turnabout! Did Fischer come up with this idea over the board?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: No, and this what's so strange about his game: Rubinetti was aware of the antecedents; there was a game I. Zaitsev - Savon, USSR 1969, and another between Istvan Polgar and T. Filep, both ending in a victory for White.

Even Najdorf had fallen into the same error (he played 10...♘c5?, without the inclusion of 10...h6, but the situation is the same) and was worse but managed to recover and win, against Palermo in Mar del Plata 1965.

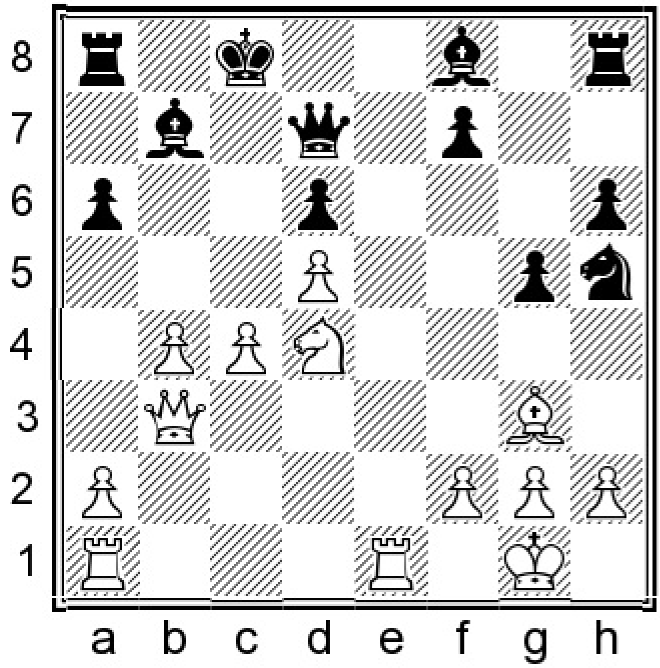
But, over the board, Rubinetti either forgot or got mixed up. After the game he even mentioned these earlier games to Fischer; years later Rubinetti related to me how a surprised Fischer said to those watching: "He knows! He knows!".

16...♔c8 17.♕xa4

The engines prefer to play 17.♗xf6 first, but for a human it's difficult to see the reason for exchanging the bishop in the absence of any threat.

17...♕d7 18.♕b3 g5 19.♗g3 ♘h5

19...h5 fails to improve the situation for Black; White could play 20.f3, but even better is 20.♕f3 ♖h6 21.♘f5 ♖g6 22.h4, since deploying the knight on the commanding f5-square represents further progress for White.



Exercise: How did Fischer continue here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20.c5!

Now that the black knight has moved away, this is a good moment to open the centre.

20...dxc5 21.bxc5 ♛xd5

If 21...♝xd5 then 22.♕b6 (threatening 23.c6 and 23.♖e8+) 22...♛b7 23.♕a5, followed by 24.c6, even after 23...♘xg3 (24.c6), which confirms that the attack is unstoppable.

22.♖e8+

The black king can't survive with so many lines now open.

22...♔d7 23.♕a4+ ♝c6 24.♘xc6

If 24...♔xe8 then 25.♖e1+ ♔d7 26.♘a7+ and mate.

1–0

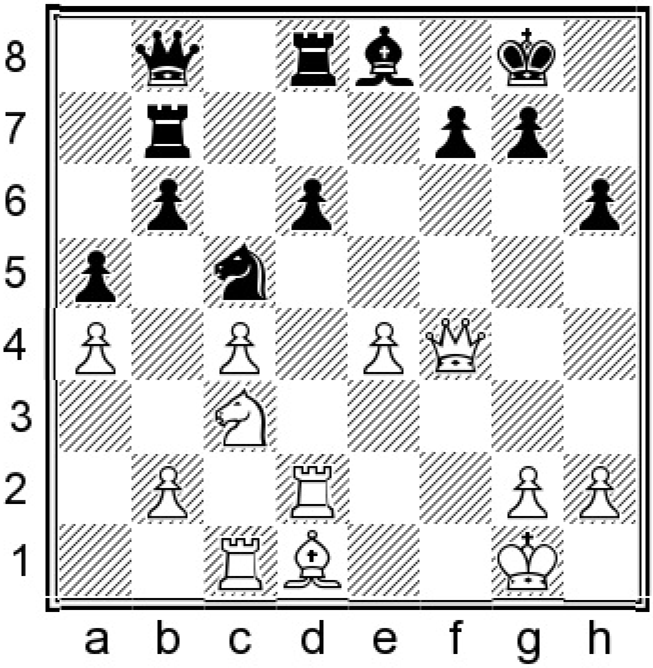
Game 50

“Fischer’s ending”

Mark Taimanov commented: “This was our second meeting over the board. At the finish, when the American won six games in a row [plus the win by default against Panno] as if in a single breath, I too became one of his victims. But I have to admit that in this encounter I felt Fischer’s great strength only towards the end, for almost throughout the game the strategic initiative undoubtedly belonged to me, and it was only time-trouble errors that disrupted the favourable course of events. (...) this game (...) was destined to become a prologue to our coming match.”

Robert Fischer
Mark Taimanov
Sicilian Defence [B44]
Palma de Mallorca Interzonal (19), 06.12.1970

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e6 5.♘b5 d6 6.c4 a6 7.♘5c3 ♘f6 8.♗e2 ♗e7 9.0-0 0-0 10.♘a3 b6 11.♗e3 ♗d7 12.♖c1 ♕b8 13.f3 ♖a7 14.♘c2 ♖d8 15.♕e1 ♗e8 16.♕f2 ♖b7 17.a4 a5 18.♘d4 ♘xd4 19.♗xd4 ♘d7 20.♕g3 ♗f6 21.♗xf6 ♘xf6 22.♖fd1 e5 23.♕h4 h6 24.♖d2 ♘d7 25.♗d1 ♘c5 26.f4 exf4 27.♕xf4



Black to play

Taimanov was right; up to this point he had played better than Fischer and his position is slightly better. The exchange of dark-squared bishops has favoured him and his remaining minor pieces are also stronger.

But we know that the objective factors are only one part of the equation, almost always the most important one, but if there is any time pressure the situation is less clear.

27...♘e6?!

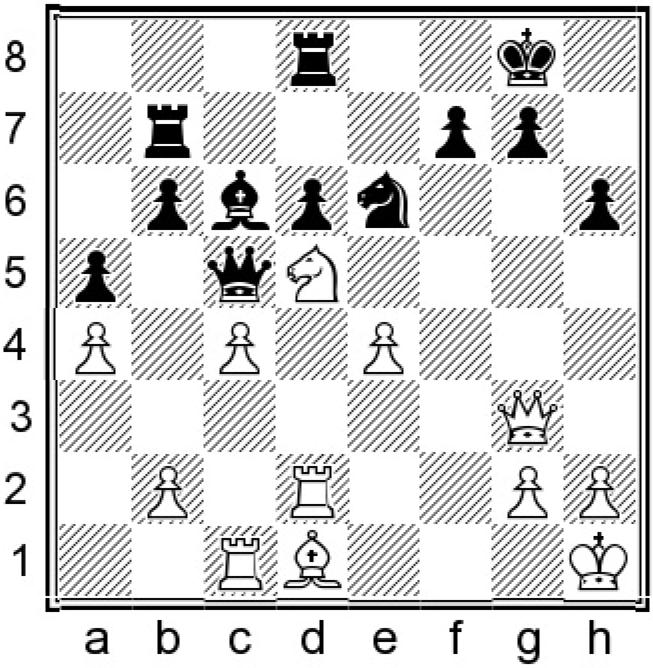
A move which can only be explained by time pressure; why give up the excellent c5-square, instead of activating a piece?

27...♗c6 was logical, to be followed by ...♖e7, as was Taimanov's suggestion of 27...♖e7 28.♗c2 ♖e5, "in the spirit of the blockade."

28.♕g3 ♕c7

This was the idea, to clear the c5-square for the queen, and that's where it goes, but it will soon be seen that this isn't an improvement, compared to the lines mentioned in the previous note.

29.♘d5 ♕c5+ 30.♔h1 ♗c6



Black prepares to exchange of the strong d5-knight, in order to leave White with just his "bad" bishop.

Question: This seems like an interesting idea, doesn't it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Of course, but it would have been better if the position were blocked, to prevent White from reviving his bishop following the exchange on d5.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

31.♖c3!

This prevents the threat for now, as 32.cxd5 would win material, and it creates the possibility of activating the rook along the third rank.

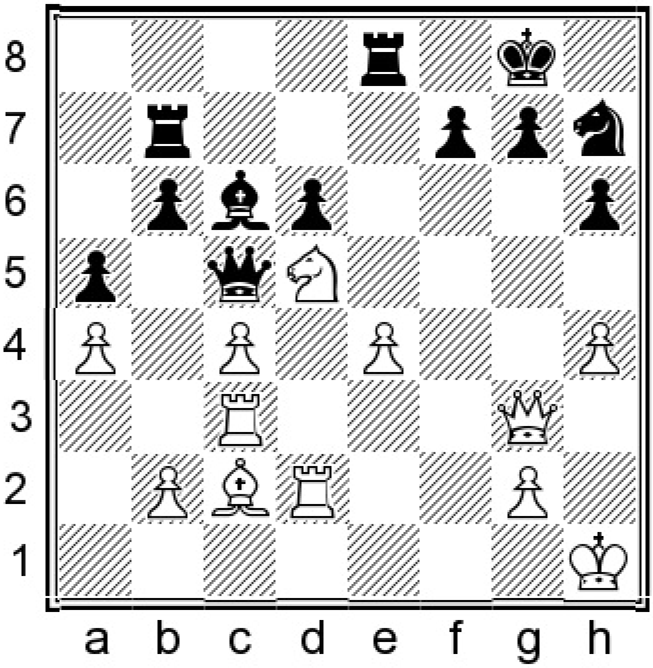
It's notable that the engines prefer the "unhuman" move 31.♗c2, without activating the rook; then 31...♕xc4? Would be bad due to 32.♖dd1!.

31...♘g5 32.♗c2 ♗xd5

This was the idea, also approved by the engines. Black is still OK, although this move leaves Fischer with one of his favourite imbalances: a bishop against a knight, although there are still many other pieces on the board, of course.

It would have been preferable to postpone this exchange and first activate more pieces, but after the natural 32...♖e8 Taimanov was worried, with full justification, about 33.h4!, when 33...♘xe4? loses to 34.♗xe4 ♖xe4 35.♘f6+.

Instead, retreating with 33...♘h7, placing the knight temporarily in a passive position, isn't attractive, especially in time pressure.



There are several possibilities now, but the strongest continuation is to go over to the offensive with 34.♘e3!, attacking d6 and with the idea of moving to f5.

Then 34...♗xe4? is bad, in view of 35.♗xe4 ♖xe4 36.♖d5 ♕c7 37.♘f5 g6 38.h5, with a decisive attack, while 34...♖d7 is also inadequate due to 35.♘f5 ♕e5 36.♖xd6.

At a time when the engines were not as strong as they are now, it was commented that the best response to 34.♘e3! would be 34...♖e6, but in fact there is a continuation that gives White a clear advantage.

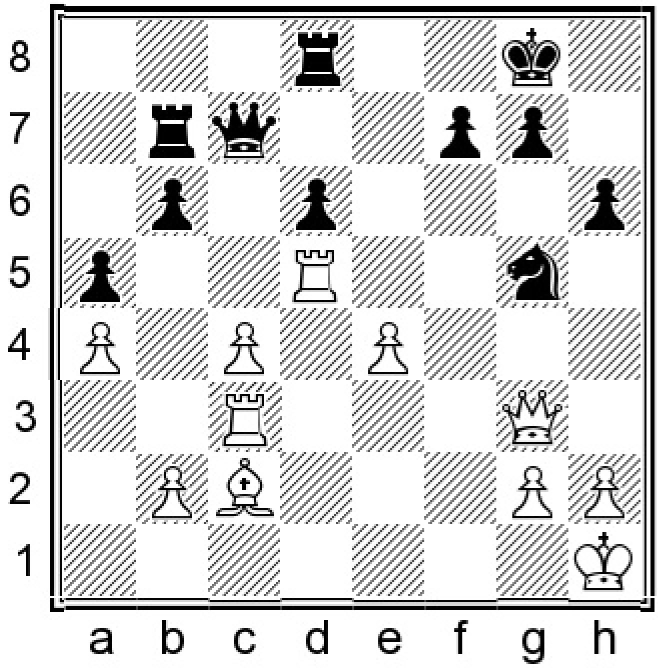
Exercise (difficult): What would you play in answer to 34...♖e6?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The attractive 35.♘f5 fails to achieve much after 35...♖g6, e.g. 36.♕f2 h5 37.♕d4 ♘f8, not fearing 38.♘xd6 ♕xd4 39.♖xd4 ♖d7 40.♘f5 ♖xd4 41.♘xd4 ♘d7, followed by ...♘c5, and White cannot retain his extra pawn for very long; there are other lines, but nothing conclusive.

The refutation is based on exploiting Black's main tactical weakness, which is his rather restricted queen: after 35.♖d5!! Black loses material, e.g. 35...♗xd5 36.cxd5 ♖g6 37.♕h3 and after the black queen retreats White has 38.♕c8+, while after 35...♕b4 36.♖b3 ♕xa4 37.♖xb6 Black must give up his queen with 37...♕xc2, since if 37...♕a1+ then 38.♖d1.

33.♖xd5 ♕c7



Exercise: How did Fischer respond?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

34.e5!

Fischer doesn’t hesitate to bring his bishop back to life.

34...dxe5 35.♕xe5 ♖db8

A passive move, pre-emptively defending the b6-pawn against a future ♖b5; it isn’t bad, but more precise was 35...♘e6!, which “would have allowed the safe consolidation of the position,” as Taimanov indicated.

Question: This seems obvious, doesn’t it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Perhaps, and with enough time Taimanov would probably have played this, but in time pressure it was necessary to be sure that 36.♕e4 isn’t dangerous, and with calm it can be seen that it’s not; admittedly 36...♘f8?? fails to 37.♖xd8 ♕xd8 38.♕xb7, but after 36...g6 37.♖xd8+ ♘xd8 38.h4 it’s possible to play 38...h5 39.♖e3 ♘e6, and Black is OK.

The position remains equal, but Black’s passive reply gave Fischer a possibility to slightly sharpen the position.

Exercise: How did Fischer create some practical chances?

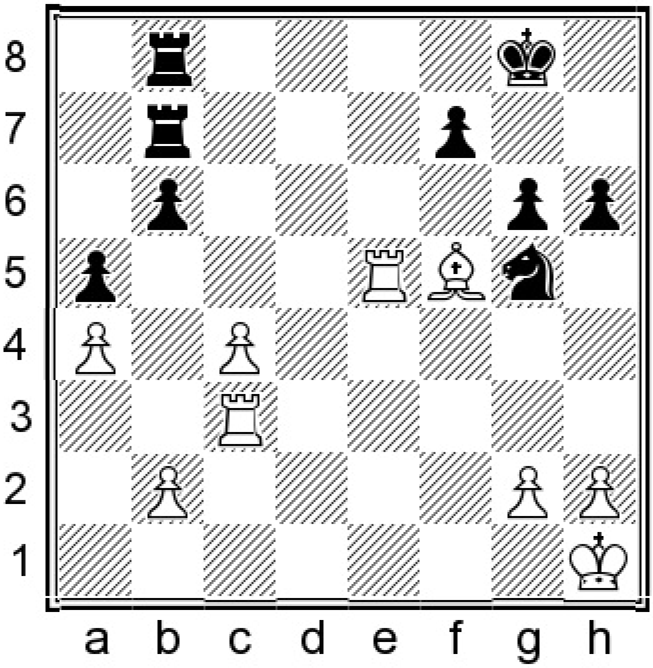
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

36.♗f5!

For the moment White prevents 36...♘e6 and plans bring the bishop to a better position.

36...♕xe5 37.♖xe5 g6



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

38.h4!

Seeking complicate the play; the retreat 38.♗g4 would allow Black to "wake up" with 38...♖d8 39.h4 ♖d4!.

38...♘h7

With 38...f6 Black could force the exchange of minor pieces; Kasparov considered that although White is a little better, the ending is tenable after 39.♖b5 gxf5 40.hxg5 hxg5 41.♖xf5 ♔g7, as indicated by Taimanov, or 39.♗e6+ ♘xe6 40.♖xe6 ♔f7 41.♖c6 ♖e8.

The move played is objectively slightly better.

39.♗g4

Kasparov highlighted that in two games of their later candidates match Fischer also achieved the same balance de forces (or Taimanov allowed it), and all three ended with victory for Fischer.

39...♘f6 40.♗f3

The bishop reaches its most effective position, on the long diagonal, but the game remains balanced.

40...♖d7?

The last move to reach the time control; it’s a natural move at first glance, seeking activity by occupying an open file, but in fact this is a blunder.

Exercise: How did Fischer show that Black’s last move black was bad?

Show/Hide Solution

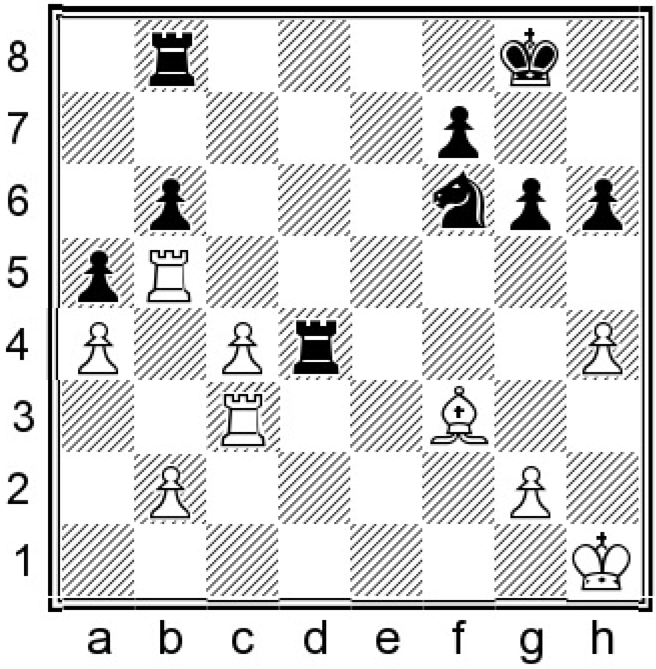
Answer:

41.♖b5!

After this it can be seen that 40...♖c7! was necessary, leaving d7 free for the knight, as indicated by Taimanov.

41...♖d4

This was the sealed move.



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

42.c5!

With an energetic temporary pawn sacrifice; this is the top choice of the engines in early 2021.

Taimanov and his second Vasiukov had hopes of saving the game if Fischer opted for the tempting 42.h5 g5 43.c5; they analysed 43...♖e8 44.cxb6 g4 in depth, but instead of the complications arising from 45.b7, White has the simple 45.♗c6!, which is winning.

Nevertheless, the inclusion of 42.h5?! g5 43.c5 would have given Black counter-chances by playing the immediate 43...g4!, after 44.♗c6 Kasparov indicated 44...♘xh5 45.cxb6 g3! 46.♗f3 ♖xa4 47.♖c1 ♘f4, followed by ...♘e6; there are more lines, in one of which White gains some winning chances, but minimal in comparison with the game.

42...♖xh4+ 43.♔g1 ♖b4

Forced; in the event of 43...♖xa4 44.♖xb6 Black must give up his knight to stop the pawn.

Exercise: Here Fischer played the strongest move – what is it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

44.♖xb4!

Much more precise than 44.♖b3 ♖xb3 45.♖xb3 ♘d7 46.c6 ♘e5 47.♗d5 ♖c8! 48.♖xb6 ♔f8, “ things would have been much more difficult for White” (Taimanov).

Fifty years later, this analysis and evaluation are still valid. Kasparov took it a little further, giving as an example 49.♖a6 ♔e7 50.♖xa5 ♔d6 51.b4 f5 52.♗b3 ♘xc6 53.♖d5+ ♔e7 54.♖c5 ♔d6, with good practical drawing chances.

Fischer chooses something clearer; his bishop will not be restricted as in these lines and a single passed pawn supported by the bishop will be sufficient, or, as Kasparov summarised it: “The outcome is decided by the total domination of the bishop over the knight.”

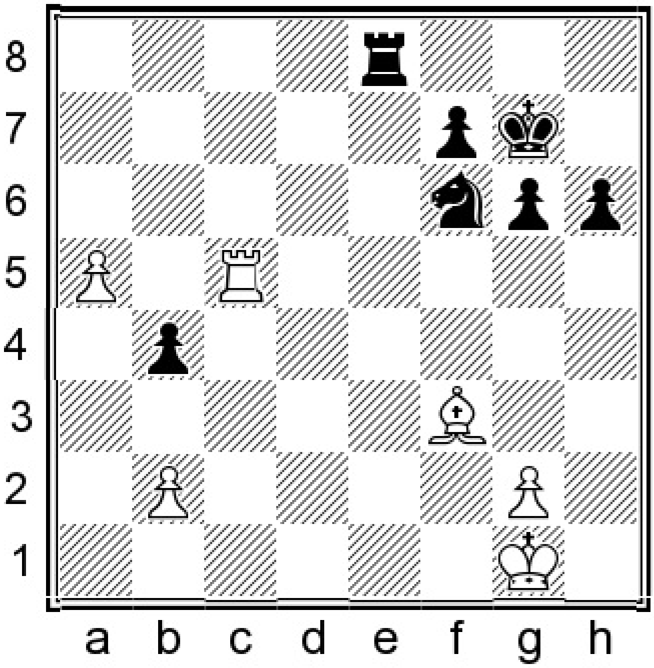
44...axb4 45.♖c4 bxc5

If 45...♘d7 then 46.c6 wins.

46.♖xc5 ♔g7

Defending with 46...g5 47.a5 g4 48.♗c6 ♖c8 fails to 49.♖c4, followed by a6 and ♔f1, if necessary.

47.a5 ♖e8



"Whenever with rook and bishop against rook and knight the side with the bishop plays for a win then we call that a 'Fischer endgame'. In the present case Bobby demonstrates how it is done," was Müller's comment, a few moves earlier.

Exercise: How did this demonstration continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

48.♖c1!

"A text-book manoeuvre!" (Taimanov).

The rook is going behind the passed pawn, as Tarrasch advised.

48...♖e5

If 48...♖e7 then 49.a6, with the idea of ♗b7, 49...♖a7 50.♗b7, e.g. 50...♘d7 51.♖c8 ♘b6 52.♖c6, followed by ♔f2, transferring the king to the queenside.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

49.♖a1

Of course, completing the manoeuvre of deploying the rook behind the pawn.

49...♖e7

Exercise (simple): What did Fischer play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

50.♔f2

Bringing the missing piece into the game; the king begins its trek to the queenside, which will decide the struggle.

50.a6 should also win, but it allows a somewhat longer resistance with 50...♖a7 51.♔f2 ♘d7; Fischer’s move is more precise.

50...♘e8

Exercise (simple): What now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

51.a6

Of course; now this is good; the rook must move and give way to the white monarch.

51...♖a7 52.♔e3 ♘c7 53.♗b7 ♘e6

Exercise (simple): What now?

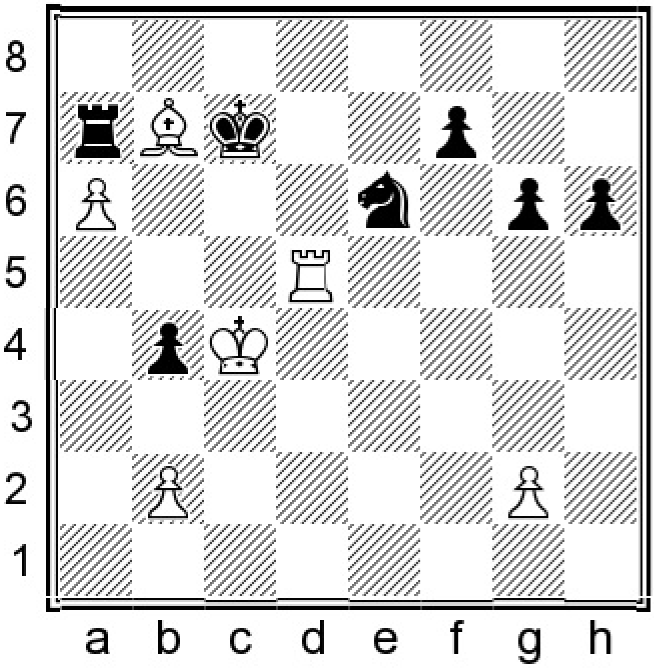
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

54.♖a5

Preparing ♔d3-c4, but first preventing ...♘c5+.

54...♔f6 55.♔d3 ♔e7 56.♔c4 ♔d6 57.♖d5+ ♔c7



Exercise: Fischer dodged the last obstacle – what do you think he played?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

58.♔b5

Fischer doesn't fall for 58.♔xb4?? ♘d8 59.♖c5+ ♔d6 60.♗c8 ♖c7, exchanging the rooks, followed by ...♔b6, blockading the two queenside pawns, after which Black would advance his kingside pawns, drawing easily.

58...♘d8 59.♖c5+ ♔d6

59...♔b8 allows mate.

60.♔b6 ♘xb7 61.♖c6+

Of course not 61.axb7?? ♖xb7+!

“Fischer conducted this ending in his patent style.” (Kasparov).

1–0

This was Taimanov’s conclusion:

“A tense battle! In the final stage, Fischer was simply magnificent! For the first time I experienced for myself that special Fischer characteristic, about which I had heard from colleagues. As soon as Fischer senses the slightest decrease in his opponent’s energy, or uncertainty in his play, he instantly musters all his strength and begins playing with a trebled determination to win.

In general, when Fischer was on form, he was simply irresistible, as though drawing inspiration from his own successes. He was irresistible in this way in his finishing spurt in Mallorca. Who could have imagined that this would be the last tournament in the career of the 27-year-old Robert Fischer?”.

Game 51

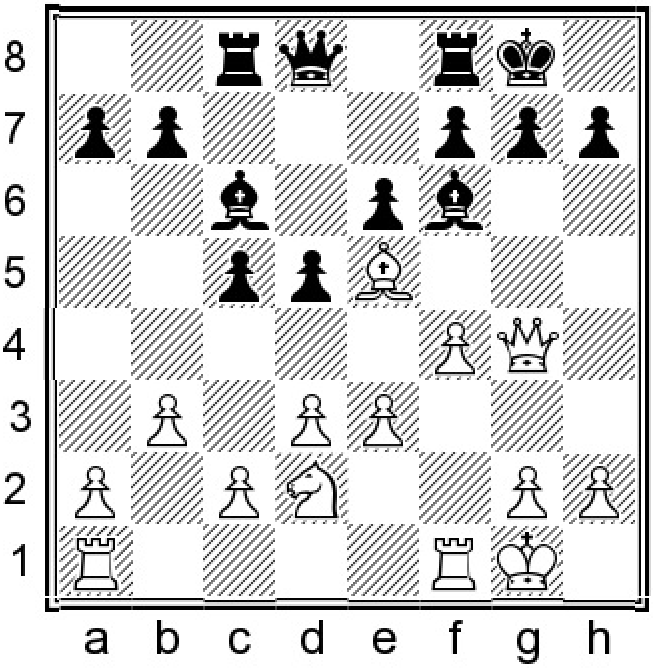
A Fourth Win with Larsen’s Opening

For the fourth time, following wins against Tukmakov and Andersson, as we have seen, as well as Filip, in the fourth round at Palma, Fischer once more employed Larsen’s Opening. Mecking, like Filip before him, varied from replying with 1...e5, as Tukmakov and Andersson had done.

This was the last time that Fischer played 1.b3 in an official game. Out of all Fischer’s recorded games, the only player who managed to draw with him was Edwin Peinado, who did play 1...e5, and the game turned into an English Opening, but this was one of a series of simultaneous games in Madrid, following the Palma de Mallorca Interzonal.

Robert Fischer
Henrique Mecking
Larsen’s Opening [A03]
Palma de Mallorca Interzonal (21), 08.12.1970

1.b3 d5 2.♗b2 c5 3.♘f3 ♘c6 4.e3 ♘f6 5.♗b5 ♗d7 6.0-0 e6 7.d3 ♗e7 8.♗xc6 ♗xc6 9.♘e5 ♖c8 10.♘d2 0-0 11.f4 ♘d7 12.♕g4 ♘xe5 13.♗xe5 ♗f6



White to play

This type of position, similar to a Nimzo-Indian Defence with colours reversed, arose frequently in the games of Nimzowitsch and, in the 1970s, Larsen.

This specific position was known to theory. As yet there is no serious imbalance. Fischer now chose what is considered to be the most promising move.

Exercise: What do think Fischer played?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

14.♖f3

White uses the possibility of manoeuvring with this rook along the third rank and makes room for the other rook to come into play; in contrast, after 14.♘f3 it would be more difficult to create threats.

14...♕e7

A move which postpones any decisions; a logical suggestion is 14...g6, preparing ...♗g7.

The move played previously here was 14...♗xe5, which at first sight looks unattractive, because it opens the f-file, which in principle favours White, but tactics trump strategy and Black can defend after 15.fxe5, but he needs to play carefully.

15...♕a5 is inappropriate in view of 16.♖g3 g6 17.♘f3!, as Nimzowitsch indicated; moving the black queen so far away from the kingside is risky.

The immediate 15...f5 is less clear, but after 16.exf6 ♖xf6 17.♖af1 ♖g6 18.♕f4, White has a slightly preferable position.

15...♕c7 is safer, attacking e5, and after 16.♕h5 the correct defence is 16...♗e8!, preparing ...f5, as was also given by Nimzowitsch, but not 16...h6?! 17.♖af1 g6? 18.♕xh6 ♕xe5 19.♖f6!, Nimzowitsch - Spielmann, New York 1927; White plans to play g4, with the plan of ♖1f3, followed by g5 and ♖h3.

15.♖af1

White continues with his idea, planning ♖h3 or ♖g3.

15...a5?!

Another move by Black which reveals confidence in his position. As Kasparov pointed out, everything indicates that Mecking thought that his kingside was in no danger, and therefore he didn't need to do anything on that side and could focus on making progress on the queenside.

Question: But it seems that there is some danger lurking. White can attack with all his major pieces; perhaps it will come to nothing, but it requires care on Black's part, doesn't it?

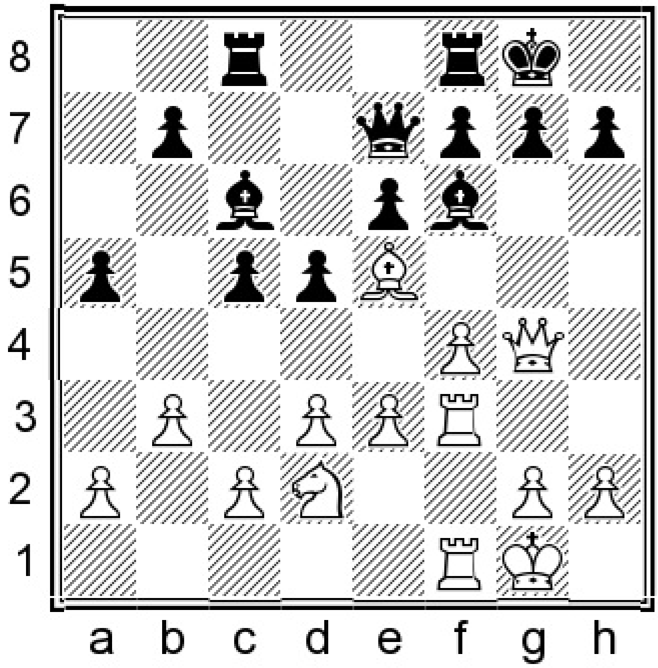
Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Care is indeed required here. Appearances can be deceptive, so a player needs to examine the possibilities concretely. In this case Black's confidence is not justified – there is a tactical flaw.

The recipe suggested earlier was now necessary; after 15...g6! Black's defence holds, for instance 16.♗xf6 ♕xf6 17.f5 exf5 18.♖xf5 isn't dangerous, due to 18...♕e7, or 18...♕e6, followed by ...♖ce8.

If 16.♖h3 then Black can play 16...♗g7, planning ...f6, e.g. after 17.♘f3 f6 18.♕h4 h6 White has no attack and he even needs to start worrying about ...g5, sacrificing the pawn to open the f-file, since the white pieces now lack coordination and the white monarch might find itself in danger.

In the event of 17.♗xg7 ♔xg7 18.♘f3 the plan of 18...f6, followed by ...♔g8, has been suggested, which seems appropriate, but there is a surprising extra possibility, 18...c4!, which despite its dubious appearance fits in with the idea of opening the queenside; then if 19.♘d4?! ♗d7, and the d4-knight isn't very effective.



Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16.♖g3!

The most natural move, threatening 17.♕xg7+!.

16...♗xe5?

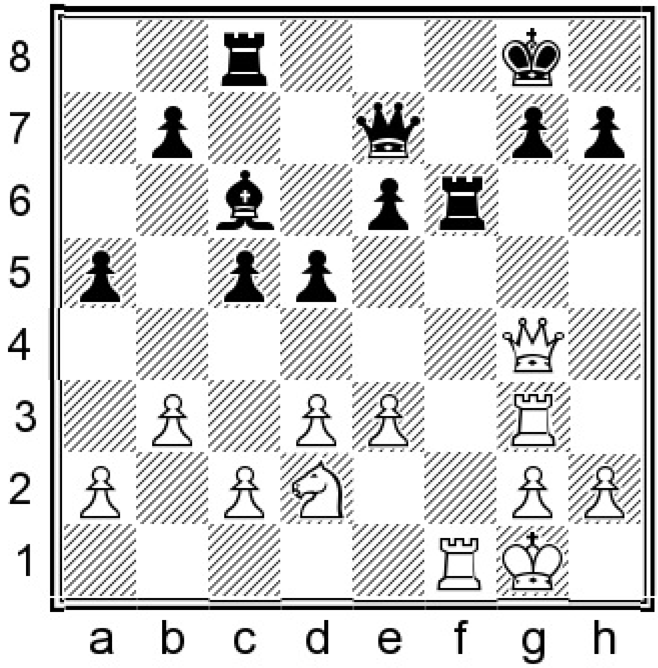
This is the decisive error, based on a tactical flaw, as we mentioned.

16...g6 was necessary, when White would be slightly better after 17.♗xf6 ♕xf6 18.h4!, although there would still be a struggle after 18...♔h8 19.h5 ♕f5, and now simply 20.♘f3 or the more aggressive 20.♕d1 ♕xh5 21.♘f3, sacrificing a pawn for the initiative.

17.fxe5 f5

Neither 17...g6 18.♖f6!, followed by h4, nor 17...f6 18.♕h4! with the idea of ♖h3, are any better.

18.exf6 ♖xf6



Exercise: How did Fischer continue here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19.♕xg7+!

This beautiful move was overlooked by Mecking, White forces an ending with an extra pawn, albeit a doubled one, but it won't be long before Fischer "very confidently converts his advantage." (Kasparov).

19...♕xg7 20.♖xf6 ♕xg3 21.hxg3 ♖e8

Exercise: How did White begin to realize his advantage?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22.g4!

The doubled pawn starts to be useful; if 22...♔g7 then 23.g5.

22...a4

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23.♘f3

Of course, now it’s the turn of the knight to be activated. White could also have activated his king with 23.♔f2, but then Black might have played 23...♖a8, when instead of 24.♖xe6? axb3 25.axb3 ♖a2, White would have to play 24.♘f3.

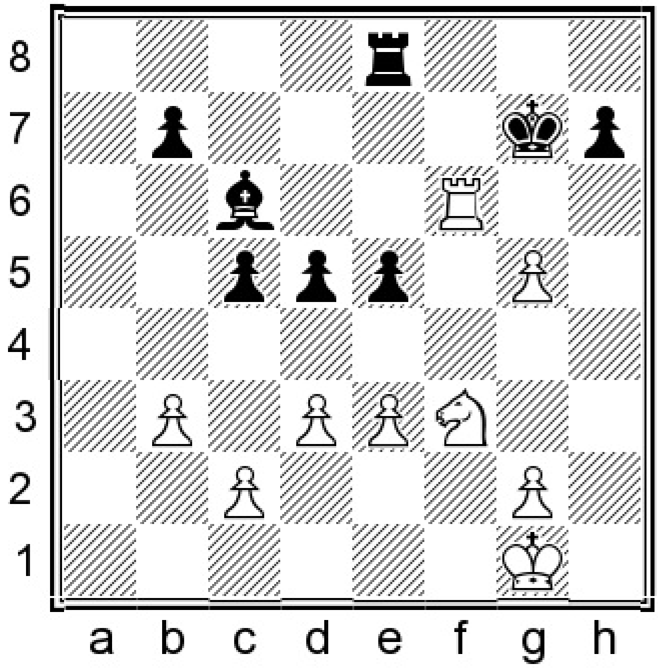
Fischer’s move is more precise; the presence of the knight is more useful, as we shall see.

23...axb3

“23...e5 looks more tenacious, although after 24.♘g5! Black’s position is unenviable,” wrote Kasparov.

The move of the knight is to prevent Black from recapturing with the rook after 24...e4 25.dxe4; also White has a possible ♘e6 in mind.

24.axb3 ♔g7 25.g5 e5



Exercise (simple): ♘e5 is no longer possible; how did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

26.♘h4!

But now f5 is a very desirable destination for the knight. The black position contains numerous weaknesses, which can be exploited thanks to the rapid advance of the g-pawn and the arrival of the knight on the kingside.

26...♗d7 27.♖d6 ♗e6 28.♔f2 ♔f7 29.♖b6 ♖e7

Exercise: White’s moves are simple; what do you think Fischer played now?

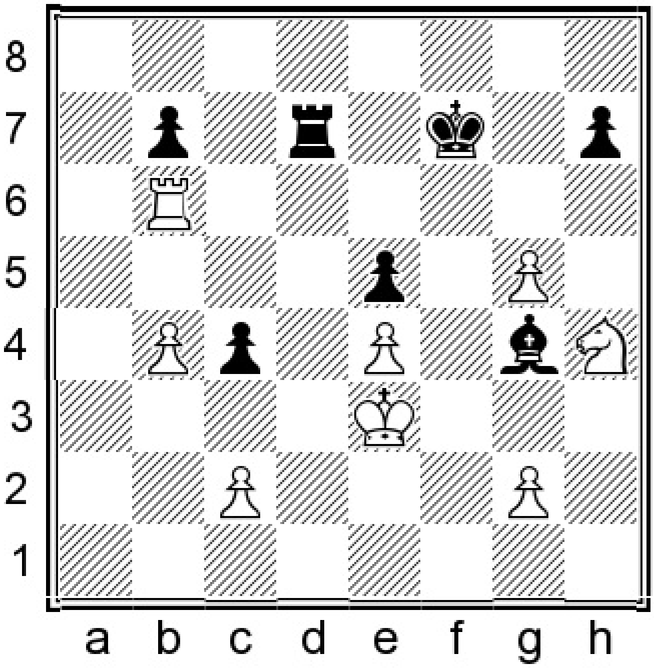
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

30.e4!

Another small step forward; the e5-pawn is now fixed and a future ♘f5 is supported; in addition, the e3-square is cleared for the monarch.

30...dxe4 31.dxe4 c4 32.b4 ♗g4 33.♔e3 ♖d7



White keeps making progress without encountering any obstacles. The position is winning, but concrete action is required. There is more than one attractive move here.

Exercise: What do you think Fischer played now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

34.g6+!

The extra pawn will no longer be doubled. Instead, 34.♘f5! was also strong, but ...you can only choose one move at a time!

34...♔f8 35.gxh7 ♖xh7 36.♘g6+ ♔e8 37.♘xe5 ♗c8 38.♘xc4

With three extra white pawns the game could have concluded here.

38...♔d8 39.♘d6 ♖g7 40.♔f2 ♔c7 41.♘xc8 ♔xc8 42.♖d6

1–0

Show in Text Mode

1971

Candidates Quarter Final Match Robert Fischer v. Mark Taimanov

Vancouver, Canada, May 1971

Fischer's first opponent was Mark Taimanov; the match was held from the 16th of May to the 1st of June. Fischer was the undoubted favourite.

Game 52

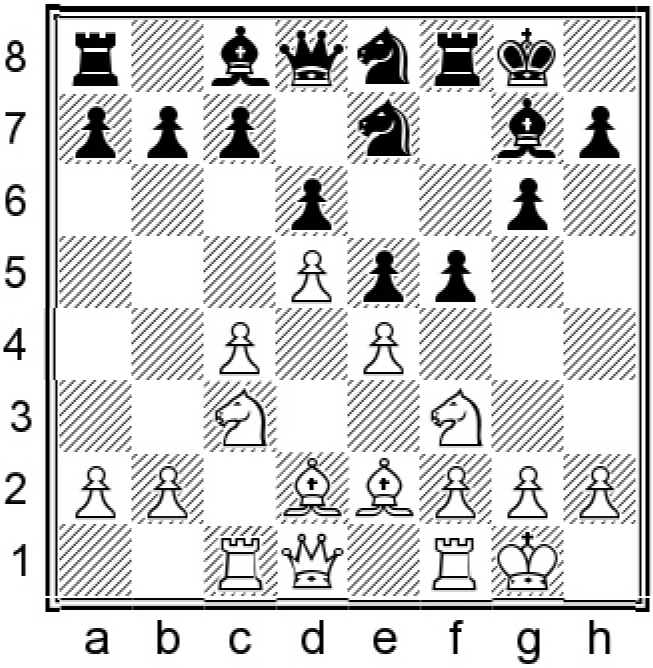
Let's look at the third game, to which Taimanov arrived full of his usual optimism. He had lost the first but nonetheless he commented that "... I was not really discouraged. I felt that throughout almost the entire game I was in no way inferior to my mighty opponent; what is more, after the bold experiment in the opening I held the initiative for a long time and was in sight of success."

The second game had been adjourned for the second time in a clearly drawn position, with Taimanov having recovered from an inferior position. Kasparov thought that Taimanov's euphoric state was what caused the tragedy that overcame him in the third game.

Fischer, as usual at the start of a competition, was very nervous.

Mark Taimanov
Robert Fischer
King's Indian Defence [E97]
Candidates match, Vancouver (3), 21.05.1971

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7 4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 0-0 6.♗e2 e5 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.d5 ♘e7 9.♗d2 ♘e8 10.♖c1 f5



11.♕b3

A novelty, deviating from their first game, in which Taimanov chose 11.exf5 gxf5 12.♘g5; the text move puts pressure on b7 and gives more force to the c5-advance, without ruling out the idea of ♘g5.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

11...b6

“Fischer thought over this move for rather a long time (which is evidence of a recognition of the merit of the opponent’s idea) and clearly came to a conclusion regarding the necessity to first and foremost stop the advance c4-c5,” wrote Taimanov.

In that purpose, the move wasn’t entirely successful and, although right now it’s not noticeable (it would be almost impossible to notice it yet), the weakness created on c6 will become relevant.

Subsequently 11...♔h8 was suggested, as well as 11...♘f6, which is the preference of the current engines; play might continue 12.exf5 gxf5 13.♘g5 c6 14.f4, with a complicated position and chances for both sides.

12.exf5 gxf5 13.♘g5 ♘f6

There is no need to play 13...h6 yet, forcing the knight to go a e6.

Balashov indicated that 13...♘g6 could also be answered with 14.f4, and after 14...♘xf4 15.♗xf4 exf4 16.♘e6 ♗xe6 17.dxe6 White's chances would be preferable.

14.f4!

This advance forms an essential part of White's idea; now Black must decide how to parry the threat of 15.fxe5 dxe5 16.c5!.

Exercise: What did Fischer play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

14...h6

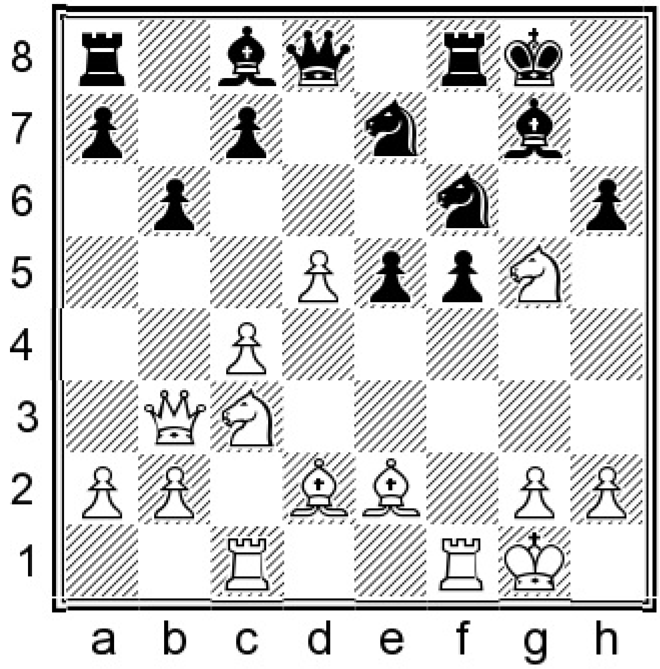
Question: What? You just said that it wasn't necessary to force the move ♘e6.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The situation isn't the same; 15.♘e6 ♗xe6 16.dxe6 c6 isn't to be feared, e.g. 17.fxe5 dxe5 18.♖cd1 ♕c7, and Black is fine.

Besides, there was no alternative; in the event of 14...e4 White would execute the typical blockading manoeuvre 15.♘d1, intending ♘e3 and later ♗c3; if Black expelled the g5-knight with ...h6 White would play ♘h3, followed by ♘f2, planning, if possible, an opportune g2-g4; Black would have no counterplay and the white position would be much better.

15.fxe5 dxe5



16.c5!

Instead, 16.♘f3 ♘g6 would give White a slight advantage, but Taimanov is not content with that. Objectively the move played isn’t any stronger, but it’s a very tempting one, and we know that over the board the objective assessment of a move can be secondary, if it offers increased practical chances.

Taimanov commented: “A hand-to-hand skirmish is beginning, demanding bold imagination, accurate calculation and... sound nerves. Incidentally, in this game nerves played ‘tricks’ on both players. I recall how at one of the moments in the game, after having made a move I, as per my age-old habit, arose from the table to stroll around the stage. Fischer, unexpectedly interrupting his thought, complained via his *chargé d’affaires* Ed Edmondson to the Head Arbiter Božidar Kažić that my movement was disturbing him. Kažić diplomatically passed this on to me, adding that for his part he could not support Fischer’s demand, since I was within my rights to walk on my half of the stage. But, not wanting any conflict, I proposed a gentlemanly compromise – if Bobby for his part would refrain from his habit of ‘drumming’ on the floor with his feet, I would go for my walk behind the curtains... Fischer agreed and a consensus was found.”

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

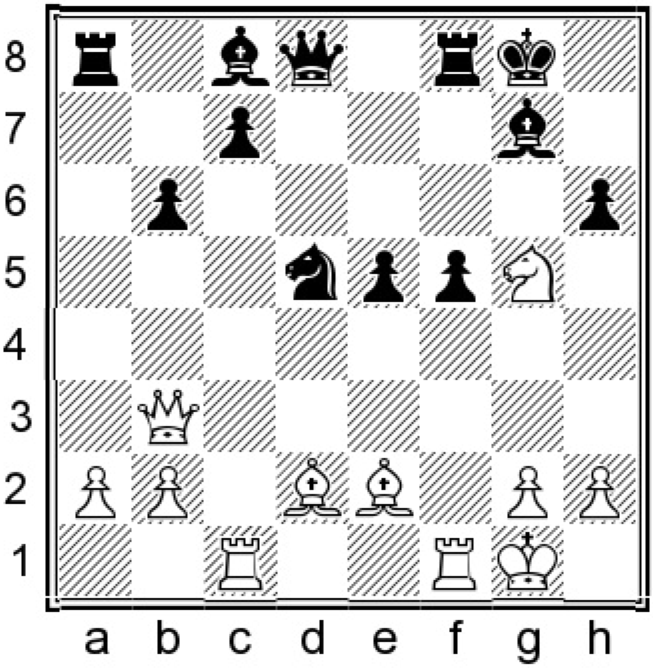
16...♘fxd5

Simplifying the defensive task.

Later analysis indicated that it was possible to play 16...hxg5 17.d6+ ♔h7 18.dxe7 ♕xe7, but this required a great deal of accurate calculation. Fischer's move reduces the options, although it's possible that it was based on an oversight, as we shall see.

17.♘xd5 ♘xd5 18.cxb6 axb6

18...hxg5? is bad due to 19.♖c6!, with the idea of ♗c4, and after 19...♔h8 (if 19...♔h7 then the immediate 20.♗c4 is possible) 20.♕h3+ ♔g8 21.♗c4 White's initiative enables him to regain the piece with advantage.



19.♖c6!

Mikhail Tal thought that Fischer had overlooked this move at the start of the complications; it prevents ...c6, making ♗c4 is a very strong threat.

Exercise: How did Fischer react?

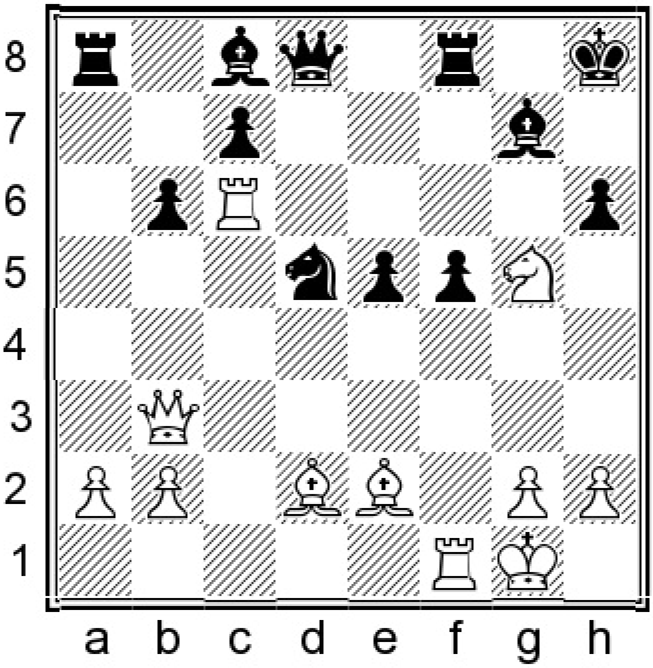
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19...♔h8!

The king moves off the dangerous a2-g8 diagonal; this is "perhaps the only means of defence." (Taimanov).

Resistance becomes impossible after 19...hxg5? 20.♗c4, e.g. 20...♔h8 21.♗xg5! (the simple 21.♗xd5! also gives an advantage, as the black king is weak) 21...♕xg5 22.♕h3+ ♗h6 23.♖xh6+ ♔g7 24.♖h7+ ♔g6 25.♗xd5 f4 26.♗e4+ ♗f5 27.♗xf5+ (better than the also advantageous 27.♖xc7) 27...♖xf5 28.♖c1! c5 29.♖d1, with a winning initiative.



"This was the turning point in the match," commented Fischer after it was all over, adding that "Taimanov missed a win with 20.♕h3."

This last remark can be considered rather a compliment to his defeated opponent. It wasn't winning, but it's an indication of how complicated the position was from a practical point of view.

Taimanov wrote that he was "experiencing a genuine thrill of the struggle, judging my position to be highly promising," but when the time came for concrete calculation he couldn't find a clear win.

"All my understanding of chess, all my experience and feeling convinced me that the position after 20.♕h3! should be winning - but no concrete ways to victory could be found! Disillusioned with the queen move, I began analysing other ideas - 20.♖d1 and 20.♗c4, but also in vain. And here I was overcome by a state of helplessness, of despair: 'Is this Fischer invulnerable, is he somehow bewitched?!' But time was passing and time-trouble was beginning to approach... I thought over this position for 72 minutes! During the half century that I have been playing I have never spent so much time on one move! And psychologically I simply collapsed. My energy dried up, apathy ensued, everything around lost sense, and I made the first move that came into my head, which turned out to be a losing one..."

20.♘f3?

Everything indicates that 20.♕h3!, with the threat of 21.♖xh6+, would have led to a balanced position.

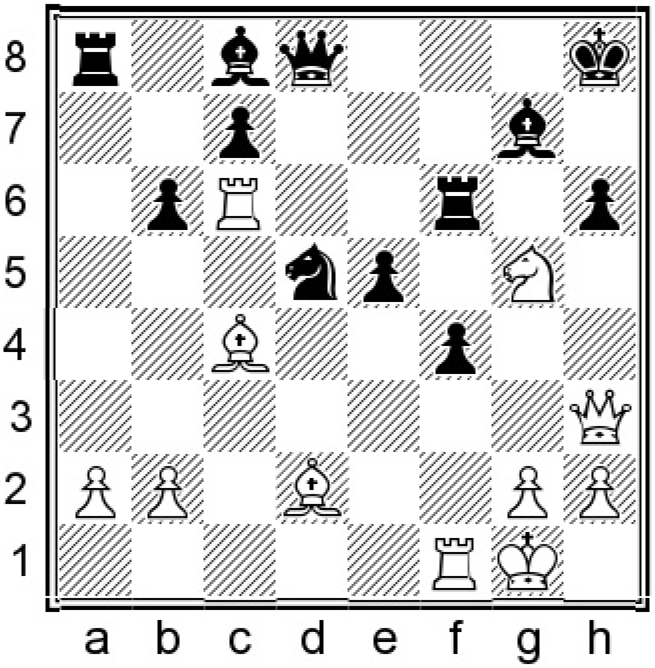
Much analysis was devoted to this position; it's a very complex one, so naturally the analyses carried out fifty years ago contained flaws.

It makes no sense to be highly critical regarding these flaws, which have not been brought to light so much by my own efforts as by today's powerful analysis engines, which have found errors even in analyses made only ten years ago. And it's a certainty that in another ten years even stronger engines will reveal mistakes in the analyses of today.

There are many lines now; let's look at a selection of the most relevant:

20...♘f6 was quickly dismissed by Taimanov, who commented that this move "could not shake my optimism" and it seems that he was right, as after 21.♗c3 f4 (not mentioned by Taimanov) 22.♕h4 ♗b7, even though Kasparov remarked that "it is not apparent how White can gain an advantage," giving 23.♘e6 as his main line, nevertheless the strongest engines in early 2021 consider that 23.♖e6! ♕d5 24.♖f2 does indeed give White the advantage - the threat of 25.♖xe5 is a strong one.

The most analysed line is 20...♖f6 21.♗c4 f4.



Now White has to choose between the several possibilities, such as 22.♖xf6, 22.♕f3 and 22.♕h5.

The ending after 22.♖xf6 ♗xh3 23.♘f7+ ♔h7 24.♘xd8 is unpromising, in view of 24...♗xf6 25.♘c6 ♗e6 26.♖e1 and here 26...b5! even gives a slight advantage to Black, if we follow this a little further: now instead of 27.♗b3?! ♖a6! 28.♘xe5 ♘e3 29.♗xe6 ♗xe5 30.♗b3 c5, with clear advantage to Black, it's better to play 27.♗xb5 ♖xa2 28.♘xe5 ♔g7, but even then it's Black who has the edge.

If 22.♕f3 once again there are many replies to analyse, including 22...e4, 22...♗b7 and even 22...hxg5!, e.g., 23.♖xf6 ♗g4! 24.♖h6+! (better than 24.♕xg4 ♘xf6, attacking d2, 25.♕h3+ ♘h7, with advantage to Black) and after 24...♗xh6 25.♕xg4 ♘f6 26.♕h3 ♕xd2 27.♕xh6+ ♘h7 28.♗f7 e4! 29.♗g6 ♕d4+ 30.♔h1 ♕g7 31.♕h5 e3, White plays 32.♗xh7 regaining the pawn and reaching a balanced position.

The third option is 22.♕h5 ♗b7 23.♖e6 ♕d7, when the most probable result is a draw after 24.♖xf6

♘xf6 25.♘f7+ ♔h7 26.♘g5+, with perpetual check.

Of course all these lines are merely a sample; there are many more possibilities; how could anyone find their way correctly over the board?

With 20.♕h3! Taimanov would not have achieved an objectively winning position, but over the board all three results would have been possible.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply to 20.♘f3?

Show/Hide Solution

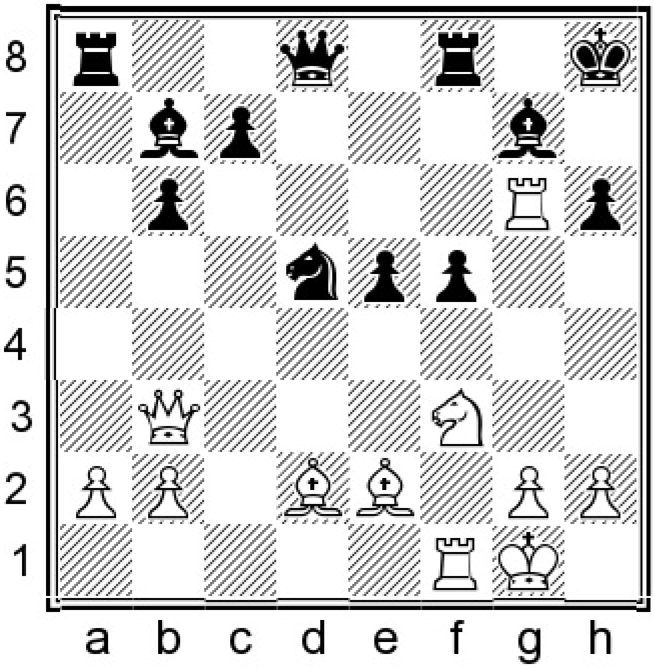
Answer:

20...♗b7!

Bringing his bishop into play with a gain of tempo; the bishop can be dangerous on the long diagonal, in connection with a possible ...♘f4.

21.♖g6

In the event of 21.♖xh6+ ♗xh6 22.♗xh6 the reply 22...♖e8? would be bad due to 23.♘g5! followed by ♕h3, while if 22...♘f4 then 23.♗c4, so the simplest seems to be 22...♕e7! 23.♗xf8 ♖xf8, with a slight advantage to Black, whose centre pawns are mobile and there is a threat of ...♘f4, as mentioned above.



The rook is still in a menacing position on g6, so Black still needs to be very careful.

Exercise: What did Fischer play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21...♘f4!

Question: This lets his pawns be doubled... Is this a good thing?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Allowing doubled pawns wasn't usual with Fischer, I admit.

Kasparov explains: "A typical Fischer decision: for the sake of activity Bobby is prepared to spoil his pawns, by exchanging his knight for the enemy bishop, which was very favourable according to his scale of piece values. (...) In addition, the situation on the board is clarified: the black bishops find very good work, whereas White's play suddenly comes to a standstill."

Another good move was 21...f4!, but we already know that in order to reach a favourable position, Fischer liked to simplify and avoid unnecessary complications.

In contrast, 21...e4? would give White a winning attack after 22.♗xh6! exf3 and now 23.♖xf3!, planning to join in the attack with 24.♖h3, to which there is no good defence.

This is stronger than the line given by Kasparov: 23.♗xg7+ ♔h7 24.♗xf8 ♔xg6 25.♕xf3 ♕g5!, which leads to a draw after e.g. 26.♗b4 (or 26.♗a3), 26...♘f4! 27.♕xb7 ♘xe2+ 28.♔f2 (or 28.♔h1 ♘g3+!) 28...♕h4+ 29.♔xe2 and Black has perpetual check after either 29...♕c4+ or 29...♖e8+.

22.♗xf4 exf4 23.♖d1 ♕e7 24.♖e6

The rook comes back into the game, because in the absence of an attack it was out of play on g6.

24...♕c5+ 25.♔f1

The king would be weaker on h1 due to possible threats of back rank mate and from f1 it also protects the bishop on e2.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

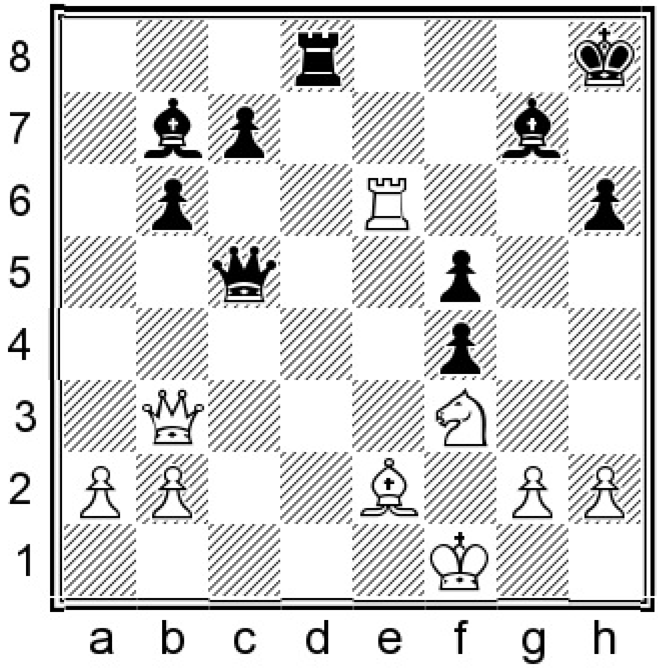
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

25...♖fd8

Offering another piece exchange, in order to be able to profit from the weakness of the white king; it also carries the threat of ...♗d5.

26.♖xd8+ ♖xd8



27.♕a4?!

It was better to prevent the threat of 27...♗d5 with 27.♗c4!, which would even unexpectedly give new life to White's attack if Black unwittingly played 27...♗e4?!, which could be answered with 28.♘g5!, with complications.

Exercise: How do you think Fischer would have responded to 27.♗c4?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: 27...♗c6! would have been strong, a "problem-like move," according to Kasparov, with the idea of...b5; Kasparov also pointed out that if 28.♖e1 then 28...♗e4! is strong, because now 29.♘g5? loses to 29...♖d2!.

It's strange that Kasparov doesn't mention 28.a4, but an extra virtue of 27...♗c6 is that it controls e8, so that Black can play 28...♖d6!, when the exchange of rooks favours Black, due to his strong bishop pair and the weakness of the white king, not forgetting that Black has an extra, albeit doubled, pawn; then if 29.♖e1 Black can play 29...♗e4! while in the event of 29.♖e7 Black has the strong the elegant 29...♖d2!.

Exercise: How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

27...♕c1+

The first step.

28.♔f2

Exercise: What’s the next step?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

28...♗f8!

The bishop threatens a winning check from c5.

29.b4

Exercise: And now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

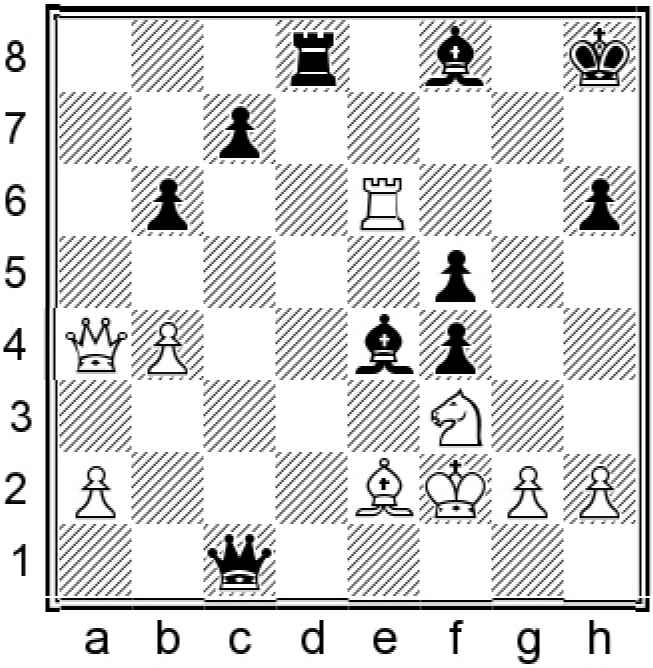
29...♗e4

“Black’s attack develops of its own accord, his doubled pawns providing important outposts for the attacking pieces.” (Taimanov).

Kasparov commented that objectively it was more precise to play 29...♗d5!, which is correct, but from the practical point of view this has little importance; Fischer’s move also wins and by now

Taimanov was in no state to offer resistance.

After 29...♗d5 30.♖e5, 30...♗g7?? would run into 31.♖xd5 ♖xd5 32.♕a8+, but instead both 30...♗e4 and 30...c6! give Black the advantage.



30.♖e8?

And here came the decisive error; as Taimanov wrote: “Alas, by this point I was unable to control my nerves.”

The most tenacious move was 30.♕b5!, with the idea of 31.♕e5+, which would have provided practical chances; then the casual 30...♔h7? would allow 31.♖xe4!

The tempting 30...♕e3+?! 31.♔f1! ♖d1+ 32.♘e1! was unclear according to Kasparov.

The right idea would be to control e5 with 30...♕c3!, which leads to a very advantageous endgame after 31.♕e5+ ♕xe5 32.♘xe5 ♔g7 33.♖g6+ ♔h7 34.♖f6 ♗xb4 35.♖f7+ ♔g8 36.♖xc7 ♖d2 37.a4 ♖a2.

The simple 30...♗d5 is also playable, and after 31.♖e8 ♖xe8 32.♕xe8 ♕e3+ 33.♕xe3 fxe3+, followed by ...♗xb4, Black would have an extra pawn and the bishop pair, while after 31.♖e5 ♗xa2 the white position would be unpleasant.

Nevertheless, there can be no doubting that 30.♕b5! would have provided White with more practical chances.

Exercise (simple): What had Taimanov overlooked?

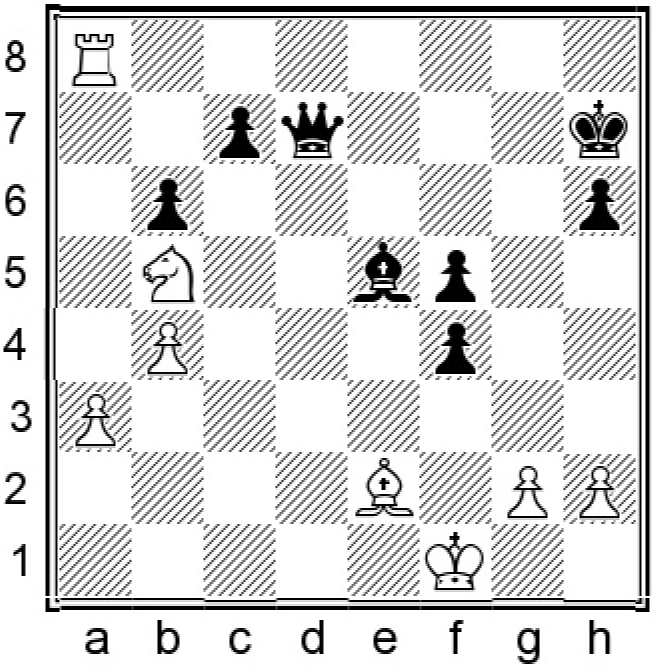
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

30...♗c6!

It’s as simple as that; White has to give up his queen, but with no possibility of offering resistance.

31.♕xc6 ♕xc6 32.♖xd8 ♕f6 33.♖c8 ♕e7 34.♔f1 ♔h7 35.♘d4 ♗g7 36.♘b5 ♗e5 37.a3 ♕d7 38.♖a8



Exercise (simple): The position is easily won, but one should always strive for accuracy. What do you think Fischer played here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

38...f3!

Arranging a favourable exchange of pawns.

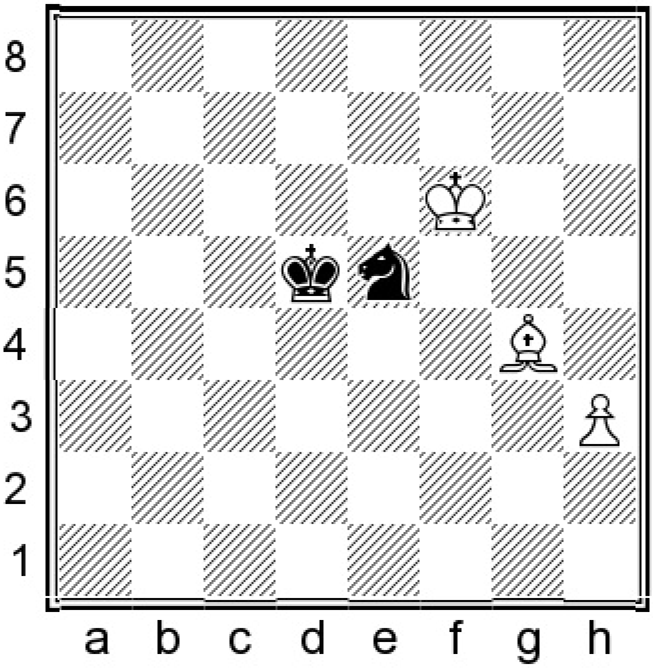
39.gxf3 ♗xh2 40.♔g2 ♕g7+ 41.♔xh2 ♕e5+ 42.♔g1

0–1

“This was perhaps the most bitter game of my life. I felt it acutely at the time and it tormented me over the course of many years...,” wrote Taimanov.

The next day saw things going from bad to worse for Taimanov; game 2 of the match was resumed in a position that was “obviously” drawn...

Robert Fischer
Mark Taimanov
Candidates match, Vancouver (2), 18.05.1971



Black to play

81...♔e4??

“An impossible blunder.” (Tal). There was a draw to be had with 81...♘d3 82.h4 (or 82.♔f5 ♔d6, intending ...♘f2 or ...♔e7) 82...♘f4 83.♔f5 ♔d6!, and after 84.♔xf4 ♔e7 the black king reaches the safe zone; White has the wrong-coloured bishop and there is no way to win.

Another way to draw was 81...♔d6 82.♗e2 (or 82.♗c8 ♘f3 83.♗b7 ♘h4 84.♔g5 ♔e7) 82...♘d7+ 83.♔f7 ♔e5 84.h4 ♘f6;

there is also a draw with the unnatural 81...♔d4.

81...♔e4??

“It seems Taimanov simply overlooked the next move.” (Tal).

Exercise: What was it that Taimanov had overlooked?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

82.♗c8!

And White queens his pawn; this is the only winning move, thanks to the check on b7.

82...♔f4

Or 82...♘f3 83.♗b7+ ♔f4 84.♗xf3 ♔xf3 85.♔g5!, and the black king is unable to reach the safe zone; or 82...♘d3 83.♗f5+.

83.h4 ♘f3

Or 83...♘g4+ 84.♔g7 and wins.

84.h5 ♘g5 85.♗f5 ♘f3 86.h6 ♘g5 87.♔g6 ♘f3 88.h7 ♘e5+ 89.♔f6

1–0

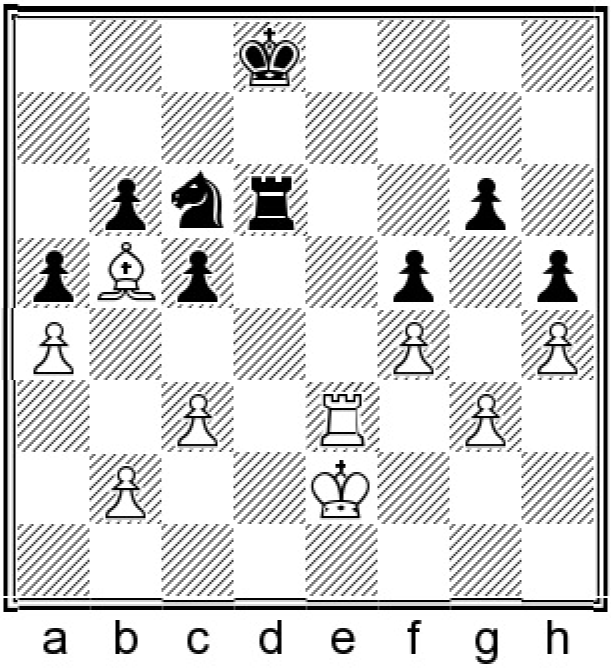
And so, from a possible score of 1½-1½, or at least only 2-1 against Taimanov, the match moved to an almost decisive 3-0 to Fischer.

Taimanov's blood pressure rose dramatically and he needed hospital treatment. The match did not recommence until four days later. In contrast, Fischer's nervousness disappeared and gave way to huge self-confidence and truly excellent play. In the fourth game, which is in all the endgame books, Fischer again played 'his' ending of rook and bishop against knight. In Kasparov's opinion, Fischer, "created a masterpiece of fine technique. Like an extra in a play, Taimanov observed White's delicate work."

Taimanov himself wrote "I felt myself to be in the role of Dr. Watson, who had to just play along and admire the resourcefulness and ingenuity of the great Sherlock Holmes."

Let's look at the final phase of this game.

Robert Fischer
Mark Taimanov
Candidates match, Vancouver (4), 25.05.1971



White to play

43.♖d3! ♔c7 44.♖xd6 ♔xd6 45.♔d3 ♘e7

“This position was destined to be included in all textbooks on the endgame, as a classic example of the superiority of bishop over knight with pawn islands on both flanks.” (Taimanov).

46.♗e8

Black has a weakness on g6, but that’s not sufficient for White to win; to have winning chances, the white monarch needs to be able to infiltrate the black position; the aim is to reach a6.

46...♔d5 47.♗f7+ ♔d6 48.♔c4 ♔c6 49.♗e8+

Guaranteeing the white king’s access to b5.

49...♔b7 50.♔b5 ♘c8 51.♗c6+ ♔c7 52.♗d5

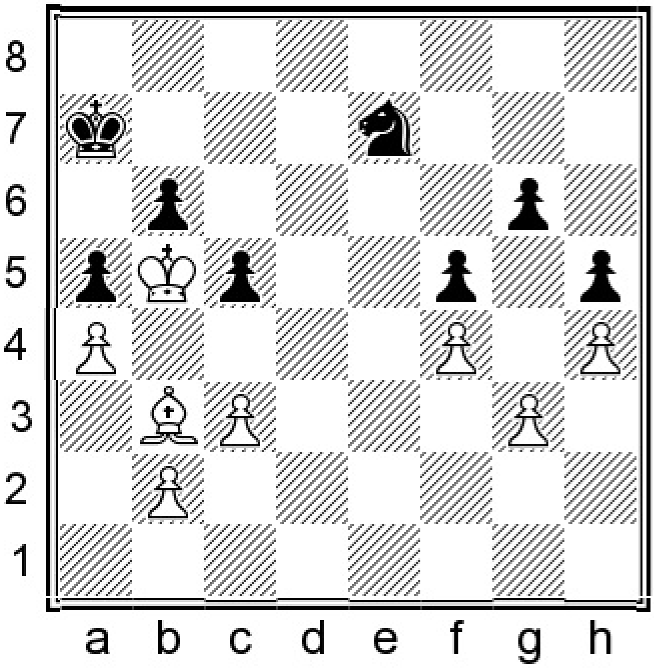
“Fischer carries out an ideal, mathematically regulated plan, based on some pretty zugzwang positions.” (Kasparov).

52...♘e7

After 52...♘d6+ 53.♔a6 White can realize his superiority, e.g. if 53...♘e4, Kasparov wrote that White wins “with an instructive variation” 54.♗f7 ♘xg3 55.♗xg6 ♔c6 (Taimanov indicated 55...♘e2 56.♗xh5 ♘xf4 57.♗f7, and wins) 56.♗e8+ ♔c7 57.♔b5 ♘e2 58.♗xh5 ♘xf4 59.♗f3 ♘h3 60.h5 ♘g5 61.h6 f4 62.♗d5 ♔d6 63.♗e4 ♔c7 64.h7 ♘f7 65.b4 cxb4 66.cxb4 axb4 67.♔xb4 ♔d6 68.♔b5 ♔c7

69.♗f3 ♘h8 70.♗h5 ♔b7 71.♔c4 ♔c6 72.♔d4, and wins. “Complete domination by the bishop!”. (Kasparov).

53.♗f7! ♔b7 54.♗b3 ♔a7



55.♗d1!

This strong and attractive manoeuvre enables the white monarch to infiltrate.

55...♔b7 56.♗f3+ ♔c7

If 56...♔a7 the most precise response is 57.c4!, after which the white king breaks in, e.g. 57...♘g8 58.♔c6 ♘f6 59.♔d6 ♘e4+ 60.♔e5 ♘xg3 61.♔f6, and wins.” (Kasparov).

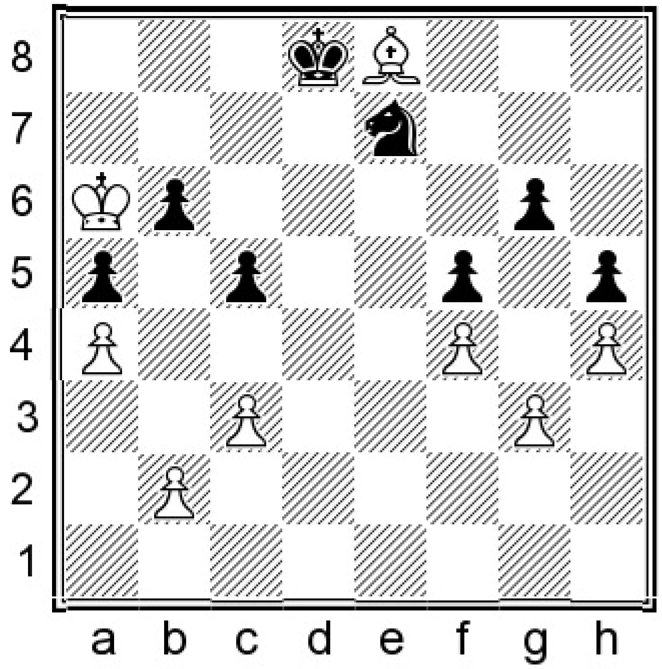
57.♔a6 ♘c8 58.♗d5 ♘e7 59.♗c4! ♘c6 60.♗f7 ♘e7

Black is in zugzwang.

61.♗e8!

And now for the finish.

61...♔d8



62.♗xg6!

White gains two connected passed pawns, which are decisive due to the remoteness of the black king.

62...♘xg6 63.♔xb6 ♔d7 64.♔xc5 ♘e7 65.b4 axb4 66.cxb4 ♘c8 67.a5 ♘d6 68.b5 ♘e4+ 69.♔b6 ♔c8 70.♔c6 ♔b8 71.b6

1–0

“This game is one of those that exerts a strong influence on the minds of chessplayers of several generations. (...) I looked at this endgame in the Baku Pioneers Palace, admiring and being amazed at how Fischer was able to separate the position into its component parts with such simplicity... More than thirty years have now passed, and this game remains an unsurpassed model example of playing the ending with bishop against knight.” (Kasparov).

Fischer also won the final two games. Evaluating the match, Bobby was magnanimous: “The 6–0 result was too much. The battle was more difficult than the final score would indicate. Taimanov had a won position in the 3rd game, where 11.♕b3 was a very important innovation, and he stood better in the 1st and 5th. It’s easier to be a gentleman when you win than when you lose, and so I congratulate Taimanov.”

Candidates Semi-final Match Robert Fischer v. Bent Larsen

Denver, USA, July 1971

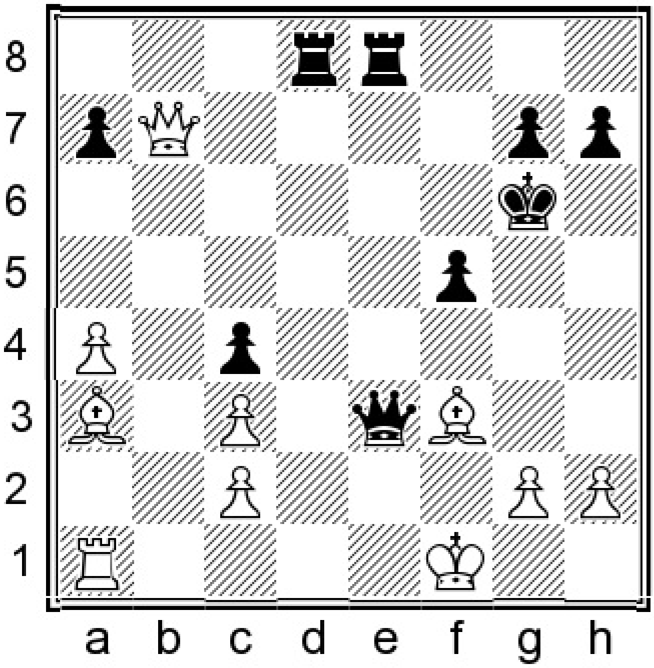
After the amazing 6–0 against Taimanov, Fischer’s next match, in the semi-final of the Candidates, was against the Dane Bent Larsen.

Fischer was the favourite again, but everyone was sure that this match was not going to be like the previous one. Larsen had been the West's first board in the 1970 USSR v. The Rest of the World Match, and he was the only one who managed to defeat Fischer in the Palma de Mallorca Interzonal that same year.

Larsen, together with his natural optimism, went to the Denver duel with complete confidence in his own strength.

However, the duel with Larsen was similar to the one with Taimanov, and again the most intense struggle took place in the first two games. Let's look at a sample of each of them.

Robert Fischer
Bent Larsen
Candidates Semi-final match, Denver (1), 06.07.1971



Black to play

In the first game Larsen surprisingly opted for the French Defence, one of the defences with the best score against Fischer, but which he, Larsen, hadn't played for twenty years.

26...♖d2

This looks very strong, and although it came to be considered as the decisive error, it's not clear that Black is losing after this move.

Instead, 26...h6 was recommended, to make the king more secure after 27.♕c6+ ♔h7, but apparently 28.♗b4! maintains White's advantage.

26...♖d2

Exercise: Now White has a defensive manoeuvre – can you find it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

27.♕c6+!

The first step.

27...♖e6

Exercise: And now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

28.♗c5!

This queen sacrifice, for sufficient material, is forced, as 28.♕c5? loses to 28...♖f2+ 29.♔g1 ♖xf3+.

28...♖f2+

Not 28...♕e5? 29.♕c8!, or 29.♗d4!

29.♔g1 ♖xg2+ 30.♔xg2 ♕d2+ 31.♔h1 ♖xc6 32.♗xc6

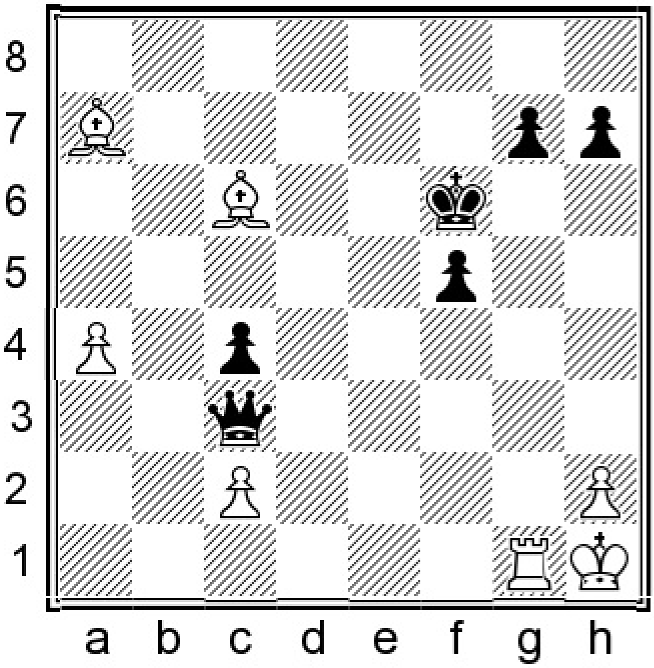
After the complications there is an unusual balance of forces. Objectively the position is equal, but the practical chances are all on White’s side, as his strong bishops nullify all risk and allow him to apply pressure.

Magnus Carlsen, more than anyone, has highlighted the importance of having the easier position to play; this is more important than the objective evaluation, even more so in cases such as this, where it is difficult to translate the objective evaluation into relatively simple moves.

32...♕xc3

This move was also criticised and 32...a5 was suggested instead, but with 33.♗d4! ♔h6 34.♖f1!, previously indicated by Timman and now endorsed by the current engines, White could still entertain hopes of victory.

33.♖g1+ ♔f6 34.♗xa7



34...g5?

According to the analysis of early 2021 this move was the decisive error.

With 34...♔e6!, evading both the check on d8 which happened in the game and a check ond4, Black seems to be able to equalise, e.g. 35.♗b6 ♕xc2 36.a5, and now (according to the engines) Black can play 36...♕a2, 36...♕b2, preventing 37.a6, or even 36...♕d3, which also prevents it due to 37...♕d6; but of course the situation would have still remained very complex and anything could happen.

35.♗b6 ♕xc2 36.a5 ♕b2

If 36...♕a2 White simply prepares the advance of his pawn with 37.♗b7, e.g. 37...c3 38.♗d4+ ♔g6 39.a6 ♕b3 40.♗g2, and the a-pawn is unstoppable.

37.♗d8+ ♔e6 38.a6 ♕a3 39.♗b7 ♕c5

Preventing ♗b6; if 39...♕b2, with the same idea, then 40.♗xg5, preparing ♗e3, and if 40...♕a3 then 41.♖e1+ and ♗e3.

A pawn race initiated with 39...c3 also loses, e.g. 40.♗b6 c2 41.a7 c1=♕ 42.♖xc1 ♕xc1+ 43.♗g1 and 44.a8=♕.

40.♖b1!

Now ♗b6 is inevitable.

40...c3 41.♗b6

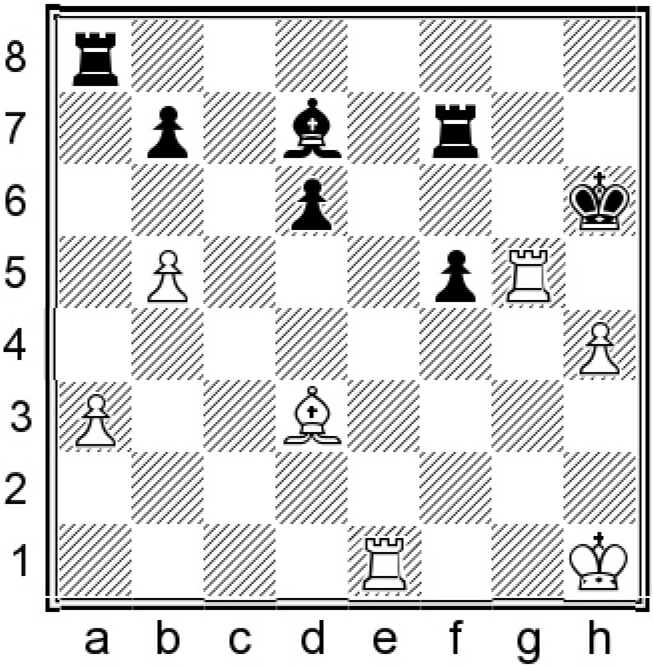
If 41...c2 then 42.♖e1+ wins.

1–0

So Fischer prevailed, although Larsen had no reason to be unhappy with his play. The game was conducted at an excellent level.

But the next game was devastating in its effect.

Bent Larsen
Robert Fischer
Candidates Semi-final match, Denver (2), 08.07.1971



White to play

In the second game Larsen again played very well, very ambitiously, pressing all through the game and appearing to have chances of victory.

In what seems like a carbon copy of what happened in the match against Taimanov, just before the unplayed move 20.♕h3! in the third game, Kasparov commented: “In this position the fate of the game was decided, and essentially that of the entire match.”

37.♗c4??

In time pressure Larsen overlooks Fischer’s crushing reply.

White would have created practical difficulties with 37.♖eg1!, when Fischer would have needed to defend carefully; for instance, not 37...♖xa3? 38.♖g6+ ♔h7, because White wins after 39.♗c4! ♖h3+

(or 39...♖f8 40.♖g7+ ♔h8 41.♖xd7) 40.♔g2 ♔xg6 41.♔xh3+.

The right move was 37...♖a4!, controlling his vital fifth rank, and after 38.♖g6+ ♔h7 39.♖xd6 ♖xh4+ 40.♔g2 the most precise defence is 40...♗xb5!, a superb drawing resource, e.g. 41.♗xb5 ♖g7+ 42.♔f2 ♖f4+ 43.♔e3 ♖e4+ 44.♔f2 ♖f4+, with a draw.

37.♗c4??

Exercise: How did Fischer punish Larsen's mistake?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

37...♖a4!

And the white position collapses.

38.♖c1?!

Slightly more tenacious was 38.♗xf7 ♖xh4+ 39.♔g2 (or 39.♔g1) 39...♔xg5, but Black would have good winning chances.

38...♗xb5! 39.♗xf7 ♖xh4+ 40.♔g2 ♔xg5

With two extra pawns, the result is no longer in doubt.

41.♗d5 ♗a6 42.♖d1 ♖a4 43.♗f3 ♖xa3 44.♖xd6 ♖a2+ 45.♔g1 ♔f4 46.♗g2 ♖b2 47.♖d7 b6 48.♖d8 ♗e2 49.♗h3 ♗g4 50.♗f1 ♗f3 51.♖b8 ♗e4 52.♗a6 ♔e3 53.♖c8 ♖b1+ 54.♔h2 ♔f4

0–1

Game 53

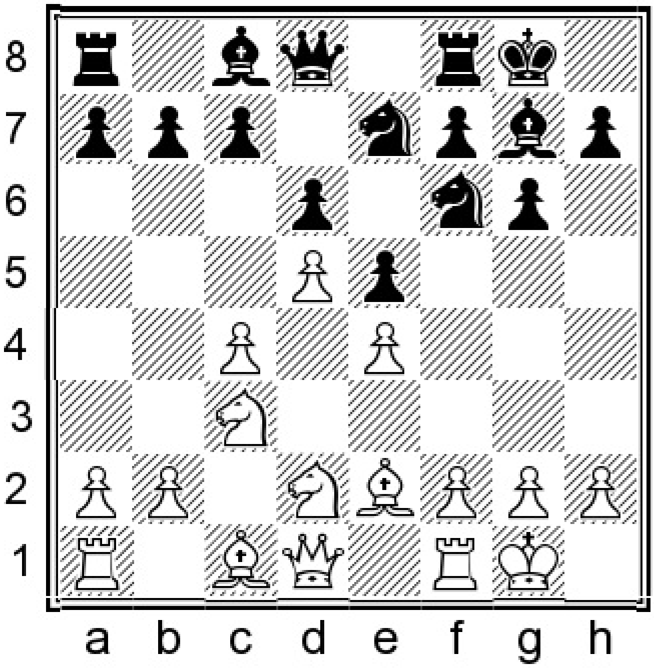
"Whereas after the first game Larsen was merely slightly shaken, after the second game he collapsed completely. Two such dramas are capable of breaking anyone!". (Kasparov).

After these two combats, on equal terms but resulting in 2–0 to Fischer, in the third game Larsen played the opening weakly and put up almost no resistance. With a 3–0 score, the match was virtually over.

Let's look at the fourth game.

Bent Larsen
Robert Fischer
King's Indian Defence [E97]

1.c4 g6 2.♘f3 ♗g7 3.d4 ♘f6 4.♘c3 0-0 5.e4 d6 6.♗e2 e5 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.d5 ♘e7 9.♘d2



9...c5!

The exclamation mark was awarded by Fischer; annotating his game with Korchnoi from Herceg Novi, he commented: “I think this is a logical move. Black takes a tempo from his kingside play to slow down White’s queenside initiative. White usually comes quickly with b4, c5 etc.”

10.♖b1

White wastes no time in trying to open lines on the queenside.

10.a3 can turn out to be a loss of time if later White plays a4 and a5, for example: 10...♘e8 11.b4 b6 12.♖b1 f5!, “Having taken all the necessary precautions on the queenside Black is now ready to attack on the king’s flank.”13.f3 f4 14.a4 g5 15.a5 ♖f6! 16.bxc5?, “This is as Korchnoi pointed out afterwards a terrible mistake because now it is impossible for White to generate any initiative on the queenside.” 16...bxc5 17.♘b3 ♖g6 18.♗d2 ♘f6 (or 18...h5!) 19.♔h1 g4, and although Fischer considered that 19...h5 was perhaps more accurate, Black’s attack prevailed anyway, 0–1 in 31 moves, Korchnoi - Fischer, Herceg Novi, 1970 (blitz).

The notes between inverted commas are by Fischer.

10...♘e8

If 10...♘d7, trying to deter 11.b4, because the knight would be able to go to c5, White could play the intermediate move 11.♘b5.

11.b4 b6 12.a4

The main alternative, often played subsequently, is 12.bxc5 bxc5 13.♘b3 f5 14.♗g5.

12...f5

Question: Why doesn’t Black prevent the advance of the a-pawn with 12...a5?

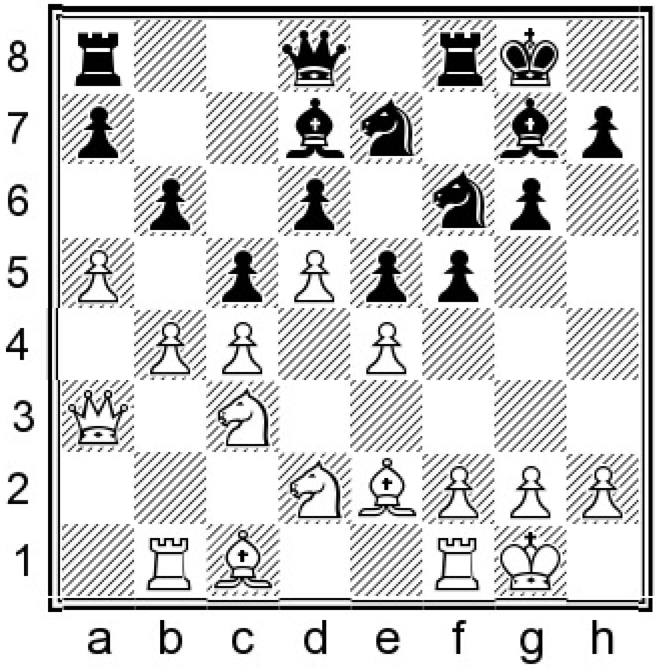
Show/Hide Solution

Answer: There is a general rule that says that it is preferable not to move any pawns on one’s weaker wing. There are exceptions of course, but this isn’t one of them; 12...a5 would be a mistake due to 13.bxa5 bxa5 14.♘b3, followed by 15.♘b5, 16.♗d2 and ♕e1, punishing Black for the weakness of the pawn on a5.

13.a5 ♘f6 14.♕a4

This line was almost abandoned by White; one try to revive it, instead of this move which increases the pressure, was 14.axb6 axb6 15.f3 and it was successful after 15...♗h6 16.♘b3 ♗xc1 17.♘xc1, with the idea of ♘d3, and ♕b3, Beliavsky - Timman Linares 1992; but of course a single example isn’t conclusive, and the line wasn’t repeated.

14...♗d7 15.♕a3



Exercise: What did Fischer play at this point?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

15...♗h6!

This is a typical manoeuvre to dispose of the black piece most restricted by the central pawn structure; the idea is exchange the bishops when White moves his knight from d2, although also capturing on d2 and then on e4 also needs to be considered.

16.♗d3

Larsen could have tried 16.bxc5 bxc5 17.a6, but 17...♖b8 holds the position. On the other hand it would be unwise to concede the dark squares with 17...♗xd2?! 18.♗xd2 ♘xe4 (or 18...fxe4 19.♗g5) 19.♘xe4 fxe4 20.♗g5.

16...♕c7

Question: Given that Black wants to attack on the kingside, doesn't this move misplace the queen?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Bringing the queen into the attack would be the ideal, but you have to know "when to punch and how to duck," remember? For now it's necessary for the queen to allow the rooks to be connected to control the b7-square.

17.bxc5 bxc5 18.exf5

18.♘b5? fails to 18...♗xb5 19.♖xb5 ♗xd2 20.♗xd2 fxe4, followed by 21...♘f5–d4, with advantage.

Exercise: How do you think Fischer recaptured on f5?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18...gxf5

Controlling the e4-square, which, as every King’s Indian player knows, is very important; in most cases this is the best recapture.

Question: 18...♘xf5, followed by ...♘d4, doesn’t look bad to me; is it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: No, it’s playable, but after 19.♘de4, the knight on e4 seems more beneficial than the one on d4, because it attacks the weakness on d6.

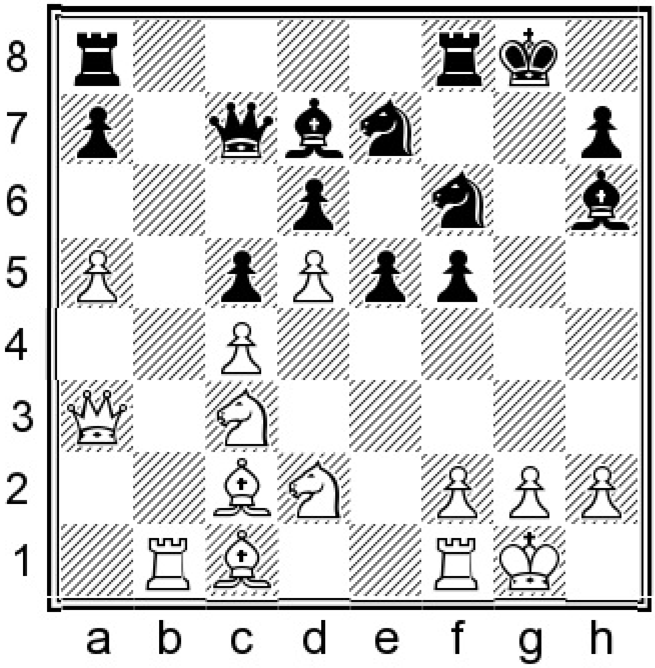
If Black’s forces could somehow collaborate with the knight on d4 it would be a different matter.

19.♗c2

Perhaps intending ♗a4, and also with the idea of 20.♘de4, which, if played immediately, would lose, because the bishop de d3 would be attacked after 20...fxe4.

It’s possible that 19.♘b5 was best, with equal chances after e.g. 19...♗xb5 20.♖xb5, when Black must choose between 20...♖ab8 or playing 20...a6 first, which seems a slight improvement; it weakens b6 in return for preventing a possible a6, followed by ♖b7 by White.

It’s worth noting that now Black could well reconsider the exchange of dark-squared bishops, because the structure has changed and his bishop is no longer a “bad bishop,” as following 18.exf5 gxf5, the game has opened up and the e- and f- pawns are mobile.



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19...a6!

An important decision, ruling out ♘b5, in exchange for granting White an important outpost on b6, but Fischer assessed that Black had a way to control this square.

It's not clear whether this is the best move objectively, but from a practical point of view it is. White must now come up with a different plan.

20.♘de4

Larsen decides to exchange some pieces which are placed rather awkwardly, trying to increase the force of his initiative on the queenside.

It would have been interesting to know what Fischer would have played after 20.♖b6; given the match situation (3–0 in a match of ten games), it is possible that most masters in that situation would have played 20...♘c8 21.♖b3 ♘e7, offering to repeat moves, and if White doesn't play 22.♖b6 Black could keep improving his position with ...♔h8, followed by ...♖g8.

It's not clear what Fischer would have done, but of course at 3–0 down Larsen couldn't allow a draw by repetition.

20...♗xc1 21.♘xf6+ ♖xf6 22.♖fxc1

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22...♖af8!

Of course, Black prepares his offensive on the kingside, while seeking to defend his queenside as economically as possible.

23.♖b6

23.♕b3?! has been recommended, sacrificing the a5-pawn in order to be able to infiltrate with the queen, but it doesn't seem to be a great improvement, as after 23...♕xa5 24.♖a1 ♕d8 25.♖xa6 ♘g6

Black continues with his attack.

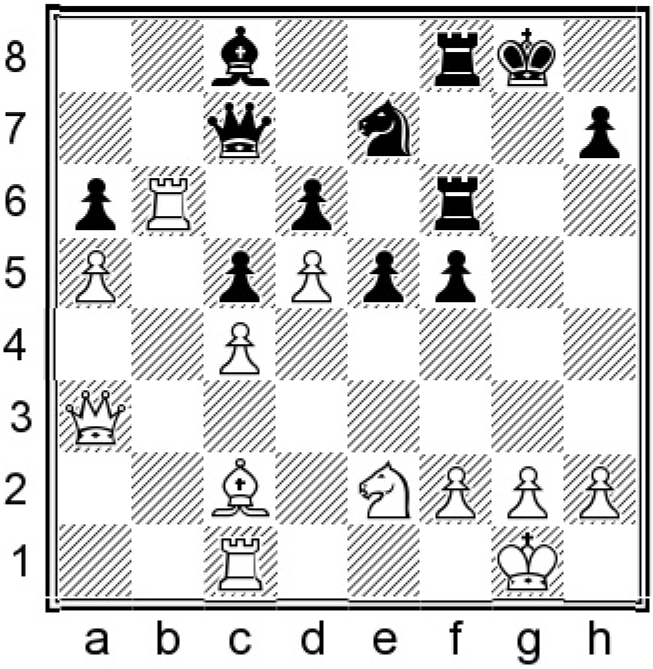
In contrast, 23.f4! ♘g6 24.♘e2 would have been better, but Larsen preferred to pursue his initiative on the queenside.

23...♗c8 24.♘e2?!

This move was unanimously criticised.

It’s easy to recommend the most natural move 24.♖cb1, although the black attack would continue to progress after for example 24...♘g6 25.♖c6 ♕g7, with the idea of ...♘h4, and Black’s initiative is the more dangerous.

Another thematic move is 24.f4, when 24...e4 would be inappropriate due to 25.♖f1, followed by ♘d1 or ♘e2, or ♗d1, depending on what Black plays; of course this would imply once again a change of plan, putting his queenside ambitions on hold for the time being.



Exercise: What did Fischer play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24...f4!

“To get squares you have to give squares, old chap!” as Najdorf would say.

Conceding the e4-square is now fully justified, as it prevents f2-f4 by White and enables both black minor pieces to become active.

25.♗e4

If 25.♘c3 then 25...♘f5 26.♘e4 (or 26.♗xf5 ♗xf5! 27.♖xa6 ♕g7, intending 28...♖g6, with a strong attack; White’s passed a-pawn will not be in time to influence the outcome) 26...♖g6, followed by the obvious ...♘d4, ...♕g7, etc., with an irresistible offensive, based on an overwhelming superiority in attacking forces.

Exercise: What move did Fischer select now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

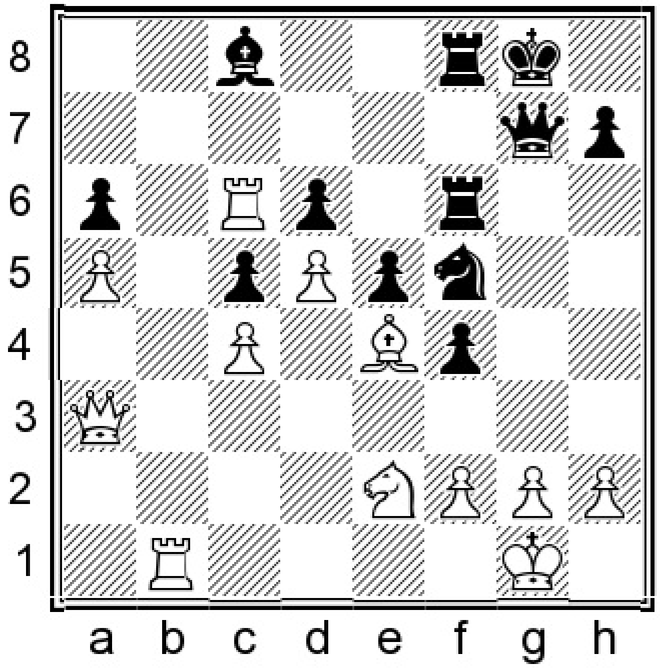
25...♘f5!

Reinforcing the offensive; conceding the c6-square is unimportant.

26.♖c6 ♕g7 27.♖b1?

Just as before, the a6-pawn is worthless after 27.♗xf5 ♗xf5 28.♖xa6 in view of, among other things, 28...♗g4 29.f3 ♗h3.

27.♔h1 was suggested, but without any great hopes; Black’s attack would continue with 27...♕g5, intending ...♖h6, or 27...♔h8 with the idea of ...♖g8, not forgetting ...♘h4; White would be unable to withstand such a concentration of forces against his king position.



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

27...♘h4!

Not fearing the double attack with 28.♖xc8 ♖xc8 29.♕h3 because of 29...♖cf8, when 30.♕xh4 runs into 30...♖h6, so White gets nothing for his exchange sacrifice.

Following the arrival of the knight there is no defence against Black's simple moves; now the threat is 28...f3.

28.♕d3

There is no time for 28.♖bb6 due to e.g. 28...♗f5! 29.♕d3 ♘xg2; White is simply unable to coordinate his forces in time.

Exercise: There are several good moves now; what do you think Fischer chose?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

28...♗f5!

He brings his bishop into play to attack the defender of g2, with an immediate threat of 29...♕xg2+ 30.♗xg2 ♗xd3, winning material, with further threats against g2 in the air.

29.♔h1

If 29.♘c3 the simplest and most deadly is 29...♗xe4 30.♕xe4 ♘xg2 (31.♕xg2 ♖g6).

Exercise: Once again there is more than one strong move; what did Fischer play?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29...f3!

Gaining a decisive material advantage; 29...♗xe4 30.♕xe4 f3 was another way and 29...♕xg2+ 30.♗xg2 ♗xd3 still works.

30.♘g3 fxg2+ 31.♔g1 ♗xe4 32.♕xe4 ♘f3+ 33.♔xg2 ♘d2

0–1

After this game, just as happened to Taimanov, Larsen's blood pressure went up and he had to consult a doctor.

The fifth game was played after three days' postponement. Fischer won the fifth and sixth games and once again the score was 6–0! That result was perhaps undeserved, but just as impressive as against Taimanov.

What caused this further overwhelming result? Larsen puts it down largely to the excessive heat in Denver. They were playing at almost 40º, despite being 1,600 metres above sea level, and he was not sleeping well.

Many years later, in Iceland, Fischer himself admitted the important effect of the climate on that overwhelming 6–0; it is true that the heat was the same for both of them but not the effect it had on them. Of course, even without external factors Fischer would still have won, although perhaps not by so great a margin.

These two matches demonstrate the truth of Kramnik's evaluation: "Fischer was the first player who created tension from the first move to the last, without giving the opponent any pause for breath. Whether in a positional or in a tactical game, he always posed as many problems to the opponent as possible."

As a sign of the amazement and admiration provoked in everyone by that 12–0 score, Mikhail Tal wrote: “(...) today it can safely be said that such a superiority in world championship events has never before been demonstrated by any contender for the chess crown.”

Candidates Final Match - Robert Fischer v. Tigran Petrosian

Buenos Aires, Argentina, September 1971

After Fischer’s resounding victories against Taimanov and Larsen, it was time for the final Candidates Match, which took place from the 29th of September to the 26th of October 1971, in the Teatro General San Martín, in Buenos Aires.

If Fischer’s previous victories were expected, although not by such a wide margin, the result of the final against the Armenian Tigran Petrosian was not so clearly foreseen.

Petrosian’s record was impressive, with no less than three matches for the World Championship, of which two were victorious. His mastery of positional play was noteworthy, as was his skill at defence, which meant that he suffered very few defeats.

Previous encounters showed three wins each and numerous draws.

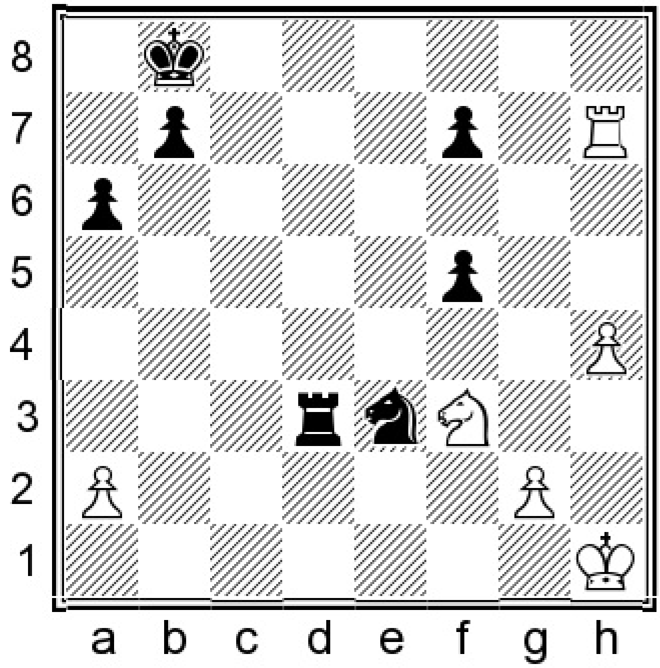
Petrosian’s path to the final was much less brilliant than Fischer’s. He scraped victories against both the German Robert Hübner and his compatriot Viktor Korchnoi, in the latter case after a series of draws, which led to a joke doing the rounds that neither of them wanted to win, in order to avoid having to play Fischer.

Asked about the result and about how long the match would last, Fischer said sincerely: “I am the best player in the world, and I am here to prove it. I have waited ten years for this moment, but I was hindered by Russian manoeuvres. I shall depart from Buenos Aires before the twelfth game is scheduled.”

Let’s move on to see how the match unfolded; the first phase was worrying for Fischer. In the first game he was left badly placed after the opening thanks to an innovation by the Russian Master V. Chebanenko. That innovation was waiting in a sealed envelope addressed “To the winner of the Match between Tigran Petrosian and Viktor Korchnoi.”

Later Petrosian could not explain to himself why he did not play what he had analysed in Moscow, which would have given him a winning position.

Robert Fischer
Tigran Petrosian
Candidates Final, Buenos Aires (1), 30.09.1971



White to move

This game has been extensively and deeply analysed. Modern engines see mistakes in all the analyses, which is not surprising, because in spite of the small amount of material present the situation is very complicated. Let’s look at its final phase.

Fischer has equalised and is now playing for a win. His greatest asset is the passed h-pawn, although for this he has had to abandon the queenside.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue to seek victory?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

34.♖xf7

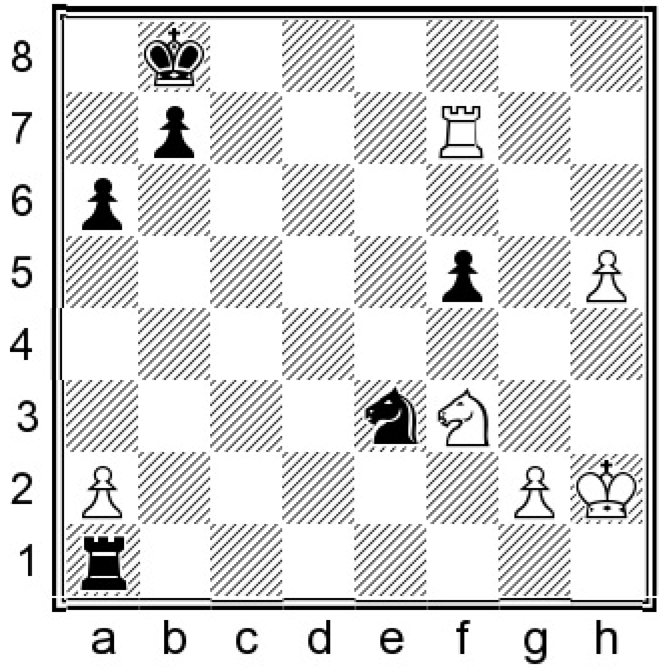
White shouldn’t rush to advance of the h-pawn just yet; 34.h5 can be answered with 34...♘g4 35.♖xf7 ♖d1+ 36.♘g1 ♘f2+ 37.♔h2 ♘g4+, with a draw, as indicated by Timman.

34.♖xf7 ♖d1+

Petrosian plays ambitiously, seeking to capture the pawn on a2 and create his own passed pawns.

There were other moves, such as 34...♔c8 35.h5 ♖d6! (Averbakh) or 34...a5 35.h5 ♖d6, but the move played also seems to be adequate.

35.♔h2 ♖a1 36.h5



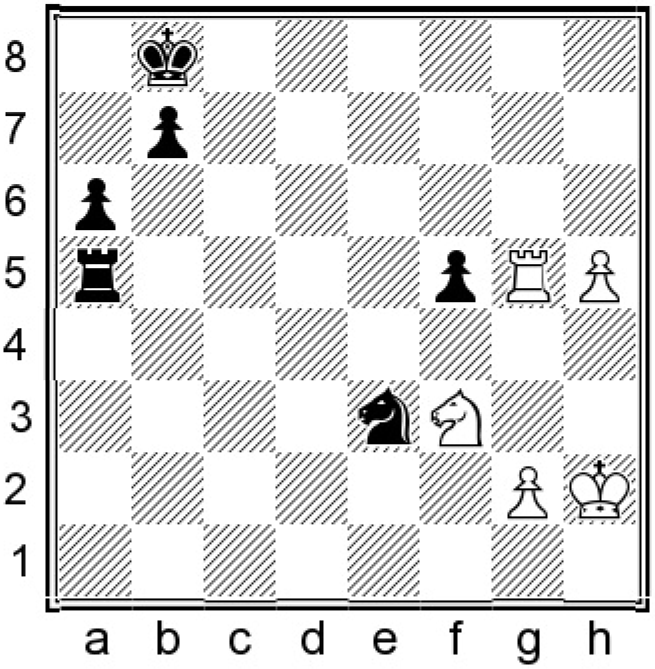
36...f4?

Petrosian collapses in time trouble and loses easily.

Kasparov indicated that the Fischer's opponents in those years (Taimanov, Larsen and Petrosian) didn't have the necessary strength (he's not talking about chess strength) to withstand the extreme pressure that Fischer exerted on them throughout the game.

The right move was to continue with his idea by playing 36...♖xa2!; then after 37.♖g7, 37...♖a5? was considered and assessed as drawing, e.g. 38.g3 f4! 39.g4 ♘xg4+ 40.♖xg4 ♖xh5+, or worse, 38.h6? ♘g4+, while 38.♔g3 also fails to win due to 38...f4+! 39.♔xf4 ♘xg2+ 40.♖xg2 ♖xh5.

But after 36...♖xa2 37.♖g7 ♖a5 White has the stronger move 38.♖g5!.

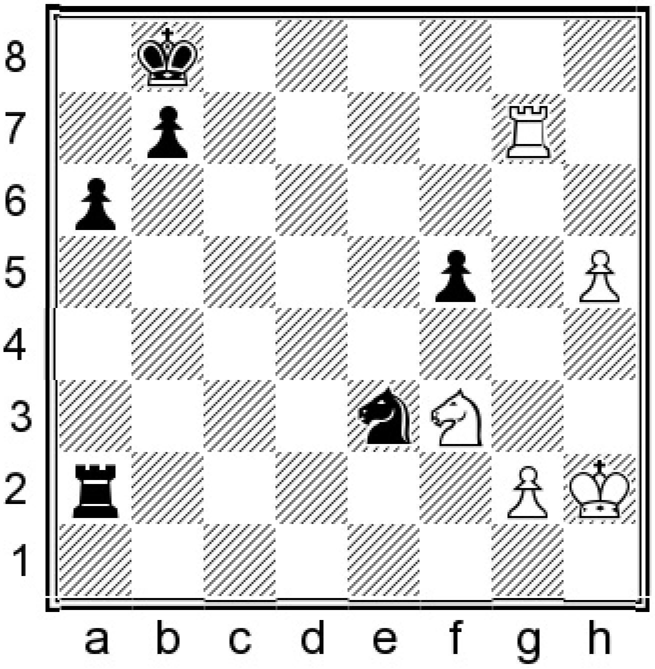


Here it was thought that 38...♖a2 would draw, e.g., 39.h6 ♘g4+! 40.♖xg4 fxg4 41.h7 gxf3 42.h8=♕+ ♔a7 43.♕d4+ ♔a8!, “successfully setting up a fortress” (Kasparov).

But White has good winning chances with 39.♔g3! ♖xg2+, and now 40.♔h4! (not 40.♔f4 ♘d5+) 40...♖c2 41.h6 ♖c4+ 42.♔h3 ♖c7 43.♖g7 ♖c6 44.h7 ♖h6+ 45.♔g3, followed by ♘e5 or ♘g5, and the h-pawn will cost Black his rook.

Also strong is 39.♘h4! ♘g4+ (39...♖a5 40.♔g3) 40.♔g3 ♘f6 41.♖xf5.

Now let’s return to 36...♖xa2 37.♖g7.



Instead of 37...♖a5? Black seems to draw with 37...♘g4+! (endorsed by Korchnoi and Furman), and after 38.♔g3 the line 38...a5 39.♔f4! a4 40.♔xf5 reaches a critical position, initially thought to be winning for White.

Exercise (difficult): How should Black fight for the draw here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: One analysis ran: 40...♘e3+? 41.♔e4 ♖e2 42.♔d3 a3 43.h6!, and White captures the black queen after 43...a2 44.h7 a1=♕ 45.h8=♕+ ♔a7 46.♖xb7+.

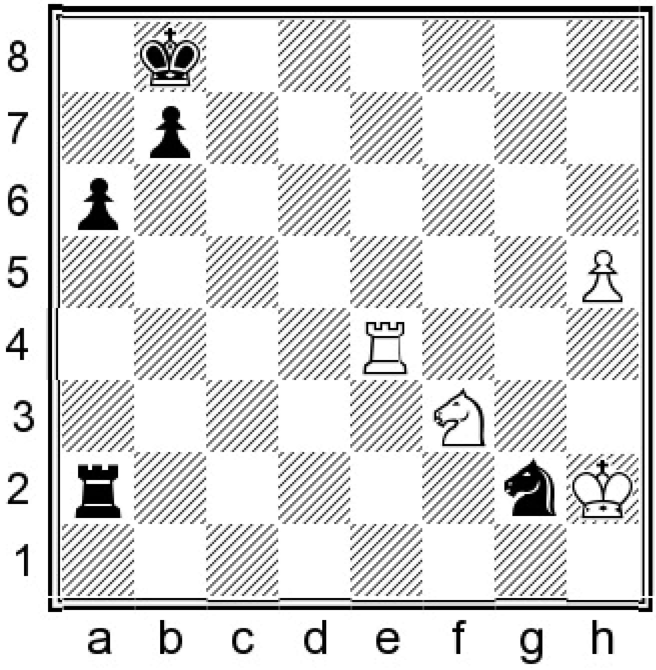
But instead of 40...♘e3+ Black has the resource of 40...♘h6+!, e.g. 41.♔g5 a3 42.♔xh6 ♖b2 43.♖g8+ ♔a7 44.♖g4 b5 45.♘d4 a2 46.♘xb5+ ♔b6 47.♖a4 ♔xb5, with a draw.

This is just a small sample of the complexities of this ending.

37.♖xf4 ♖xa2 38.♖e4!

Now there is no stopping the white h-pawn. Another way was 38.♔h3 ♘xg2 39.♖f8+ ♔a7 40.h6, which “would also have won, but Fischer finishes elegantly.” (Kasparov).

38...♘xg2



39.♔g3!

“First the knight is cut off from the passed pawn, and the next move – the rook.” (Kasparov).

39...♖a5 40.♘e5!

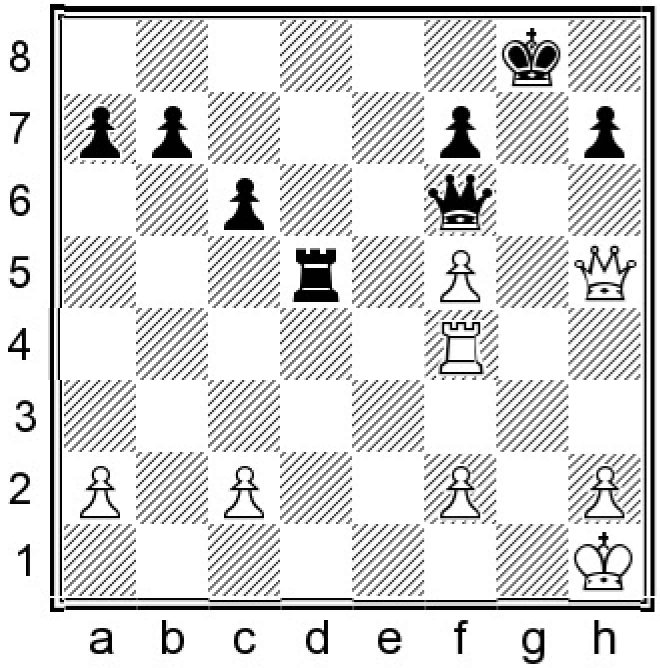
“A grandiose battle!”. (Kasparov).

1–0

The second game caused a commotion. Petrosian defeated Fischer by means of a brilliant attack; after twenty consecutive wins, Fischer suffered a defeat.

Let’s see what happened in the third game.

Robert Fischer
Tigran Petrosian
Candidates Final, Buenos Aires (3), 07.10.1971



Black to play

Black has a clear advantage; his pawn structure is far superior – White has five isolated pawns. Black also has a queenside majority. White has no compensation.

28...h6

Petrosian doesn’t want to take any important decisions yet. First he improves hiss position; with this move he makes his king a little safer.

29.h3 ♔h7

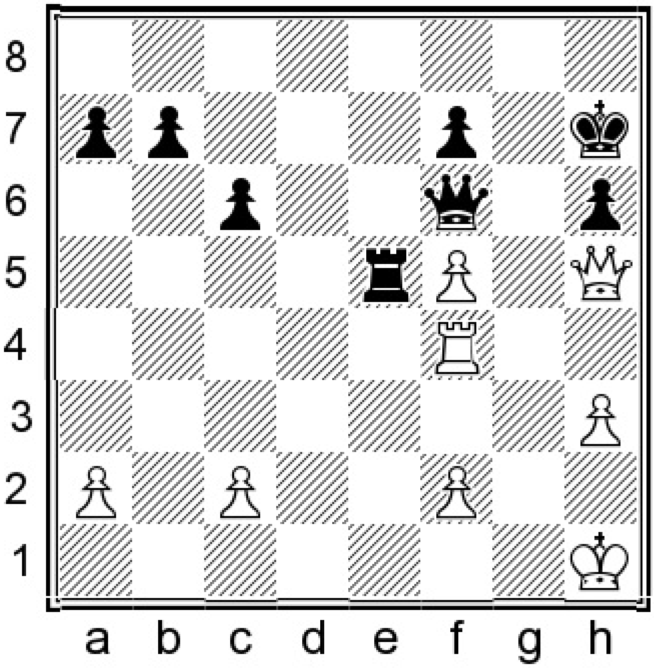
It is true that there were other good moves, such as 29...b5!, starting to advance his pawn majority, but Petrosian’s move is correct and suits his style; there’s no hurry.

As evidence that things were far from simple, let’s look at a recommendation from almost twenty years ago now which the engines of the day considered to be winning for Black: 29...♖d2 30.♕f3 ♖xc2 and here they provided many interesting lines in support of that evaluation; yet the current engines give 31.♖g4+ ♔h7 (or 31...♔f8 32.♕g3) 32.♕f4!, with the idea of 33.♕b8, and they see no advantage for Black.

30.♕e2 ♕e5 31.♕h5 ♕f6 32.♕e2 ♖e5

In an advantageous position Petrosian continues to play cat and mouse, his preferred style of play, as Fischer highlighted. This move is a sound one, giving nothing away, although there were other favourable lines available, such as once again 32...b5, indicated by Petrosian himself.

33.♕h5



“The culmination of the game, and perhaps also of the entire match.” (Kasparov).

33...♖d5?

An error which possibly loses half a point; after the natural 33...b5!, for instance, White would have found it difficult to save the game.

In the preceding phase Petrosian has preferred not to touch his pawns and maintain the position unchanged to move 40, after which he could adjourn the game and calmly analyse the most effective way to win.

Exercise: What did Fischer do now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: He summoned the arbiter and announced that he intended to play...

34.♕e2

...thus repeating the position for the third time, with the same player to move each time.

½–½

“Petrosian was distressed by this result no less than by his loss in the first game.” (Baturinsky).

In the fourth game Petrosian, with White, drew almost by force; he did so as a result of Fischer’s comments on his match with Korchnoi, saying that they had had a number of “ridiculously short” draws.”

“I wanted to confront him with something of a psychological problem, to prove to him that if I wanted to make a draw with White, I could always achieve this, and without great difficulty.” (Petrosian).

Unlike Fischer, Petrosian was diverted from his main aim, which was to defeat his opponent. Fischer commented: “At the start, I did not feel too well. But when in the fourth game, right from the opening Petrosian avoided any ‘aggression’, I realised that I would win the match.”

In the fifth game, Petrosian (with Black again!), was once more close to winning, but, as Spassky commented, “...during the fifth hour of play, when Petrosian ought to have taken vigorous steps to reap the fruits of his strategy, he was unable to do so, perhaps for reasons of nervous strain.”

Game 54

A model game

In their sixth encounter Fischer took advantage of an inaccuracy by Petrosian in the opening and gained the upper hand, which he kept throughout the game; although when the time came to adjourn the game and to seal his move, Petrosian missed an artistic opportunity to fight for a draw.

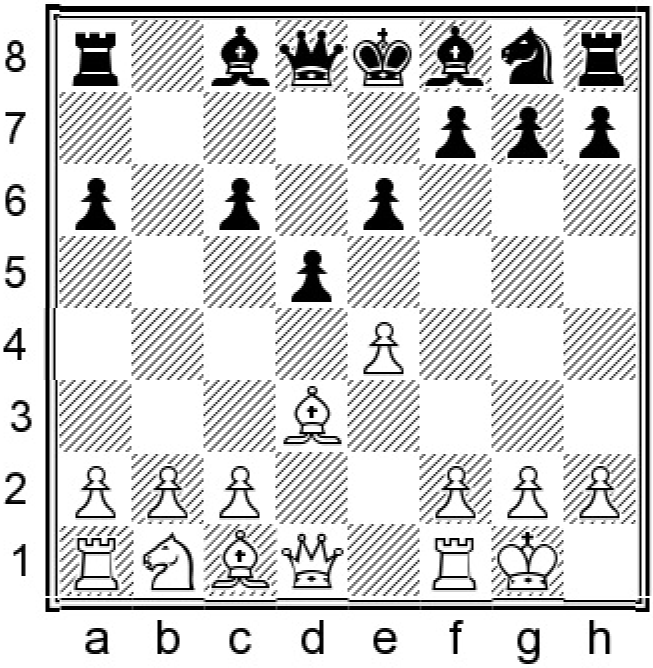
The American Yasser Seirawan is of the opinion that the most instructive games are the ones where one side is clearly stronger than the other, where tactical and strategic advantages are exploited, preventing any serious resistance by the opponent. In contrast, a struggle in which both sides “exchange blows” can also be enlightening but it’s a more complex matter to grasp the huge variety of finer points and obtain a clear lesson from it.

That solid knowledge base gives the student an essential guide to understanding well any type of position.

Seirawan includes in the first category this game from the match, which was practically decisive for the result of the match.

Robert Fischer
Tigran Petrosian
Sicilian Defence [B42]
Candidates Final, Buenos Aires (7), 19.10.1971

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 5.♗d3 ♘c6 6.♘xc6 bxc6 7.0-0 d5



8.c4!

Creating central tension before Black can stabilise his position.

In Game 1 of the second Spassky - Petrosian World Championship match, Moscow 1969, Spassky played 8.♘d2 and after 8...♘f6 9.♕e2 (or 9.b3 ♗b4! 10.♗b2 a5 11.c3 ♗e7 12.c4 0-0 13.♕c2 h6 14.a3 ♗a6!, as in the 17th game) 9...♗e7 10.b3 0-0 11.♗b2 a5, Black achieved a good position.

8...♘f6 9.cxd5

The move order 9.♘c3 ♗e7 10.cxd5 was suggested in order to reduce Black's options, but after e.g. 9...d4 10.♘e2 e5 11.f4 ♗e7! (12.fxe5 ♘g4) it's not clear that this is advantageous for White.

9...cxd5 10.exd5 exd5

Of the three possible recaptures, 10...♘xd5 seems to be the most appropriate, and after 11.♗e4 Black reaches a reasonable position with 11...♖b8.

11.♘c3

Played after thinking for twenty minutes, which was unusual for Fischer, especially with such a natural-looking move. Possibly he was analysing his following plan.

11...♗e7

Exercise: What did Fischer play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

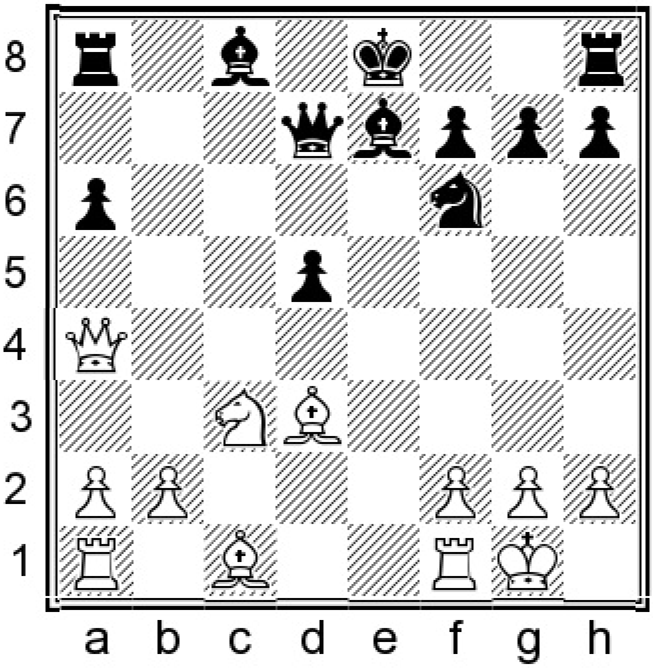
12.♕a4+!

“A highly venomous novelty” (Kasparov,) improving on 12.♗e3 0-0 13.♗d4 ♕d6 14.h3 ♗e6 15.♖e1 ♘d7, Parma - Suetin, Havana 1969, with a slight advantage to White.

12...♕d7?!

After some thought Petrosian offered to give up the exchange in return fore initiative, or else exchange the queens.

The alternative, which was subsequently considered better, was 12...♗d7!, after which White can play 13.♕d4 or 13.♕c2, with a slight advantage.



Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13.♖e1!

Fischer rejects the possible complications and, as we now know was typical of his style, he doesn't object to exchanges if they lead to an advantageous position. Black has an isolated pawn and will lack counterplay.

After 13.♗b5 axb5 14.♕xa8 0-0 15.♕a5 d4 it's not clear that the complications favour Black, but it would take the game into the sort of irrational terrain that Fischer tended to avoid if he had a favourable alternative.

Question: This rejection of positions where it is necessary to calculate wasn't because of his lack of ability in this field, was it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: No, it wasn't, but I'll let Botvinnik answer you: "When there are many pieces on the board and they are mobile, it is calculating ability that proves decisive. In this quality Fischer is similar to the former Tal. But Fischer combines this with a certain caution, fine technique, and a sober evaluation of the position."

13...♕xa4 14.♘xa4 ♗e6 15.♗e3 0-0

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16.♗c5!

With the exchange of bishops White gains the control of several dark squares, including the vital c5-square. This is a important step forward.

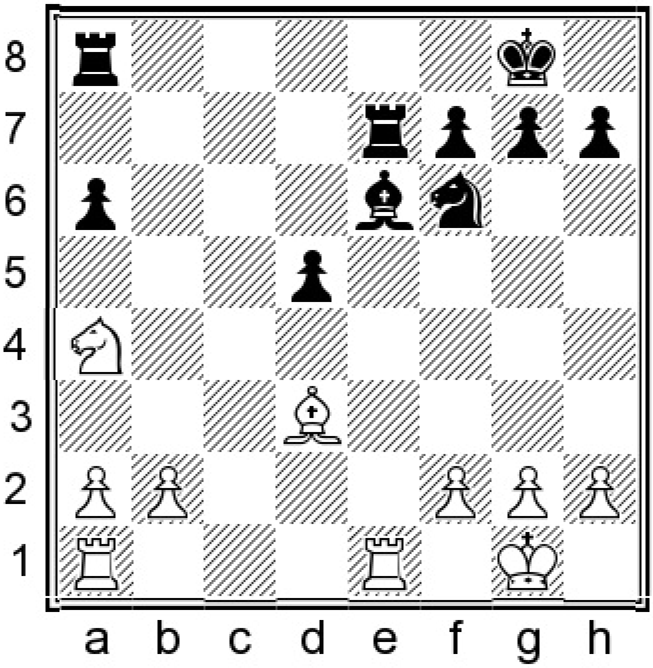
Going back, 15...♘d7 was suggested to prevent this, although White would still be slightly better after e.g. 16.♗d4 0-0 17.a3, with the idea of b4, or 17.f4, almost forcing 17...g6.

Question: But this wasn't really a substantial improvement, was it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: It's possible that objectively it would not completely solve Black's problems, but it would have the practical virtue that the way forward for White would not be as clear as after the exchange of bishops.

16...♖fe8 17.♗xe7 ♖xe7



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18.b4!

"All this was played quickly and easily by Fischer. With a precision typical of Capablanca or Smyslov, Fischer consistently improves his position. This last move fixes the pawn at a6 and significantly restricts Black's possibilities." (Averbakh).

White also dominates the c5-square.

18...♔f8

It's clear that Black can't get rid of his weakness on a6 with 18...a5 due to 19.b5!, gaining a strong passed pawn.

19.♘c5 ♗c8

Exercise: There are several possible moves here. How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20.f3

With a clear plan; he controls e4 and g4, and prepares to centralise his king.

20...♖ea7?!

Question: Yes, that’s an unusual-looking move, isn’t it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Piece exchange will generally favour White, due to the weaknesses at a6 and d5, so it’s not strange that Petrosian decides to keep pieces on the board. On the other hand this manoeuvre doesn’t improve his prospects.

20...♘d7 was suggested, but White is still better, there is no adequate compensation for the above-mentioned weaknesses after 21.♖ec1, or Stean’s suggestion of 21.♘b3 ♘e5 22.♗f1, and then if 22...♘c4 not hurrying with 23.♘c5, but first playing 23.♖ec1, or even 23.♔f2, followed by ♖ec1.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

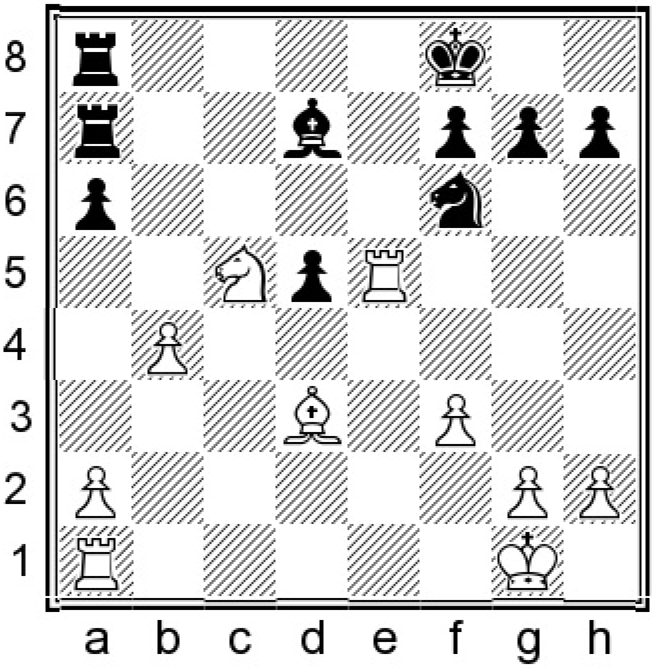
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21.♖e5!

“White ties the knight to the defence of the d5-pawn, so as not to allow the manoeuvre ...♘f6–e8-c7” (Botvinnik).

21...♗d7



In the press room they were discussing how Fischer would deal with the positional threat of ...♗b5.

Exercise: What do you think he played?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The majority of the pundits thought that 22.a4 was forced (and this is the preference of the engines in early 2021), although subsequently the general opinion was in favour of 22.♔f2 ♗b5 23.♔e3, etc., until they were informed of Fischer's reply...

22.♘xd7+!

This move caused a great sensation. Petrosian's second, Alexey Suetin, seemed relieved, and even the always expressive Miguel Najdorf exclaimed "He's crazy! Such a knight! My God! How can he give up such a knight for such a terrrrrible bishop?".

Question: So, what's the explanation then?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The explanation can be found in Tarrasch's rule: "It's not the pieces that leave the board that are important, but the ones that remain."

Seirawan adds: "The bishop may look bad but it's not. The position is open. The c5-knight is great but it blocks the open c-file. Finally, the d3-bishop is so much superior to a knight when there are pawns on both sides of the board.”

It should be noted that in early 2021, at one of the major chess websites it was stated categorically that Fischer’s move was an error which should lead only to a draw; several moves in the next phase of the game came in for criticism and it was claimed that 22.a4 was winning.

Question: So 22.♘xd7+ is a mistake that only leads to a draw?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: These conclusions are based on engine analysis in early 2021, and it’s not clear that these lengthy and categorical analyses will still stand up in a few years time when checked with even stronger engines.

I consider that our current understanding of chess doesn’t allow us to give a reply a mathematically precise verdict on a position as lively as this one.

In any case, this is a theoretical discussion, and time will tell. But if we turn to the practical aspect of it, the strength of this exchange is devastating.

22...♖xd7

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer proceed now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23.♖c1

Occupying the c-file.

23...♖d6?!

A concession, but the threat of 24.♖c6 had to be parried.

It was better to play 23...d4, according to the above-mentioned engine analysis.

24.♖c7

Another step forward; the threat is now ♖ee7. White’s moves are crystal-clear, easy to understand; all his pieces are slowly gaining ground or increasing their strength.

Question: It looks easy, but it can’t be, can it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Some moves are simple; with other moves the simplicity is only apparent, but the really difficult thing is to arrive at a position where several moves appear natural or easy.

24...♘d7 25.♖e2 g6

Controlling f5. “Black’s position is uncommonly depressing.” (Kasparov).

Exercise: How did Fischer continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

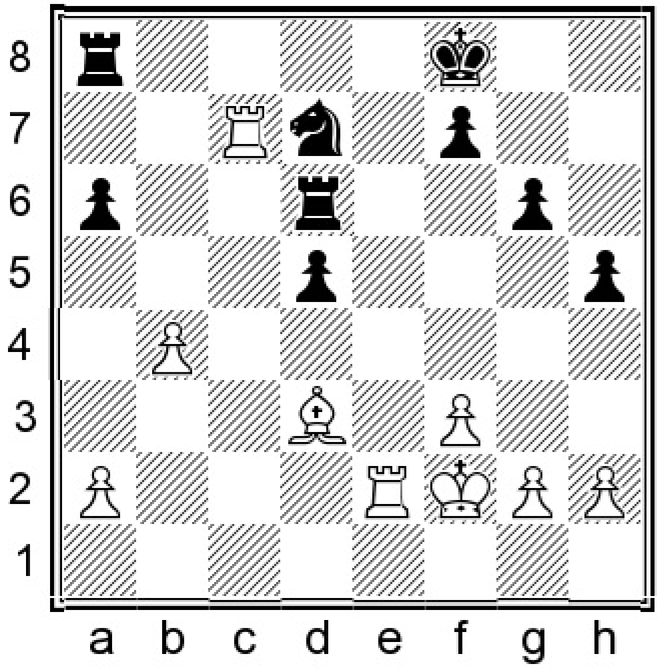
26.♔f2

All the white pieces are in their optimal positions, so now it’s time to improve the position of the king as well.

26...h5

Of course 26...♖e8 27.♖xe8+ ♔xe8 28.♖a7, followed by ♔e3, offered no hope.

Botvinnik suggested seeking counterplay with 26...♖b8 27.a3 a5, which could be answered with our familiar 28.b5, and after 28...a4 White can continue to improve his pieces with ♔e1-d2-c3; but 28.bxa5 seems even better, since after 28...♖b3 29.♖d2 ♘e5 30.♗e2 ♖xa3 31.a6, with ideas such as ♖cc2, intending ♖a2, White also has an overwhelming advantage.



Exercise: How did Fischer make another step forward?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

27.f4!

"Restricting the possible activity of the black knight" (Botvinnik); 27.a4 was also strong.

27...h4

Here 27...♘b6 was suggested, with the idea of answering 28.♖ee7 with 28...♖f6 29.g3 ♖d8, but this is still better for White (as long as he avoids 30.♗xa6? ♘a8!). It's possible that this was theoretically better, but practice is something else: White can also strengthen his position first with e.g. 28.g3, intending ♖ec2-c6 at an appropriate moment, without ruling out ♖ee7 and/or improving the king, depending on what Black plays.

28.♔f3 f5?!

This move is possibly a result of Petrosian considering that his position was now beyond salvation; it prevents ♔g4, but further weakens Black's second rank; instead, 28...d4 was more tenacious.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29.♔e3

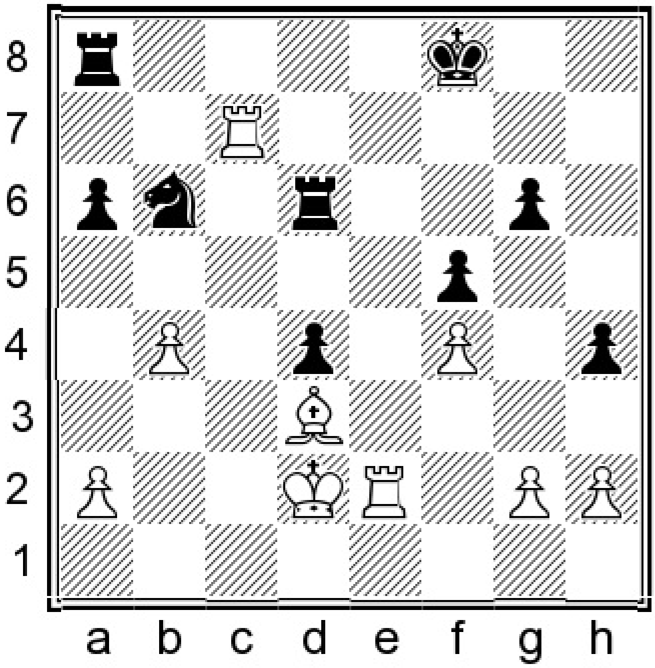
The threat is 30.♔d4, with total domination.

29...d4+ 30.♔d2

With the threat of 31.♗c4, followed by ♔d3 and ♖e6, as indicated by Kasparov.

30...♘b6

"Equivalent to capitulation, but there were already many weaknesses in the black position." (Botvinnik).



Exercise (simple): Why was Black's move equivalent to capitulation?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

31.♖ee7

Now White's domination is absolute. Mating threats will soon appear, combined with pressure on

Black’s weaknesses at a6 and d4.

GM Robert Byrne, working as the correspondent for the New York Times in Buenos Aires, commented that Suetin was looking pale; the Russian grandmaster came up to him and murmured something like “My God, he plays so simply!”.

31...♘d5 32.♖f7+ ♔e8 33.♖b7 ♘xf4

According to some sources, Black’s move was 33...♘xb4, but Fischer confirmed that this the text move was definitely the move played.

There was already no good defence; if 33...♖b6 34.♖xb6 ♘xb6 (or 34...♔xf7 35.♗c4) then White wins with 35.♖g7 or 35.♖f6, while if 33...♖b8 then, among other things, 34.♖a7 is decisive, intending ♖h7; then if 34...♘f6 White has the simple 35.a3, followed by 36.♗c2, while if 34...♖a8 then 35.♖xa8+ ♔xf7 36.♗c4 wins.

34.♗c4

1–0

Petrosian declared: “After the 6th game Fischer really did become a genius; I, on the other hand, either had a breakdown, or I was tired, or something else happened, but the last three games were no longer chess...”

Spassky wrote: “I think that the Sicilian Defence chosen by Petrosian in the 7th game indicates his striving for revenge at any cost. However, it proved to be Fischer’s best game of the match; in it he was able to demonstrate his best qualities as a chessplayer and a fighter. (...) after it, it became clear that Petrosian would not be able to save the match.”

Fischer also considered the seventh game to be his best.

After two final wins for Fischer, the match finished 6½ – 2½.

Fischer praised Petrosian’s play, accepting that in the first five games he could have been defeated in almost all of them, while Spassky blamed Petrosian’s final collapse on his lack of determination to give himself over totally to a fight without quarter.

Petrosian complained about many things after the match, pointing out that the privileges that Fischer received put his opponents at a psychological disadvantage, although he did not give a convincing explanation of what those privileges were. One thing that he did say was that the lighting was as Fischer preferred it, but Fischer demanded better lighting so that both of them could see, not just because it was more to his liking. The fact that Fischer demanded better playing conditions is something for which we should be grateful to him.

One thing which we can say with certainty must have annoyed Petrosian was that the city of Buenos Aires continued to be home territory for Fischer, where he continued to be idolised.

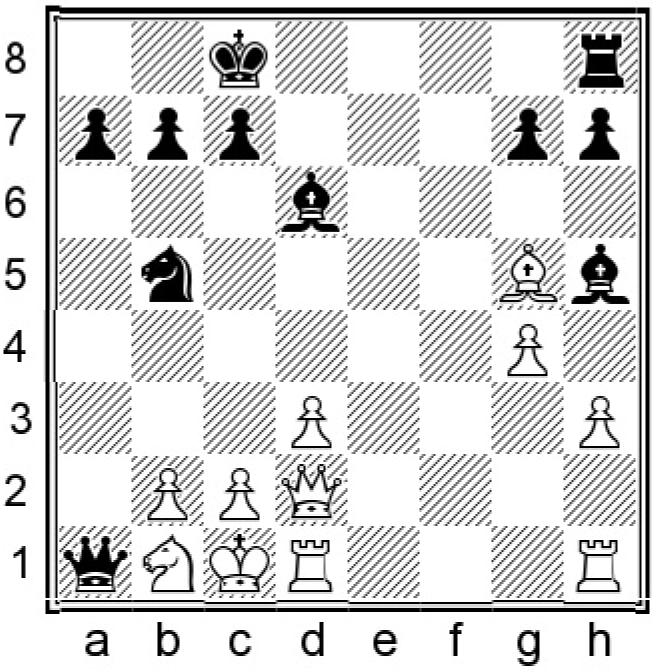
Fischer’s total absorption in chess

Tim Krabbé reports an amazing tale at his website, timkr.home.xs4all.nl: from the Brazilian master Herman van Riemsdijk he had learned of “one of those little stories that serve to refresh your awe for the greats.”

It was in late 1971; Fischer had just won his candidates match against Petrosian in Buenos Aires. Fischer and his friend GM Miguel Quinteros bumped into Van Riemsdijk just as they coming down the stairs of the chess club. Quinteros introduced them. When Fischer heard the name ‘Van Riemsdijk’, he immediately said: “In your third match game against Medina, he could have refuted your combination if he doesn’t take on h5, but plays ♖df1,” and rattled off a few relevant variations. Van Riemsdijk assured me that at that moment, those match games had only been in the bulletins of the Hoogovens Tournament, where that match [six games], half a year earlier, had been a little side-show. Neither he nor Medina were players whose doings Fischer had to keep track of, but he knew the games. Probably this was because he was interested in analysing positions, whatever their source.

Antonio Medina García
Herman Claudius Van Riemsdijk
Vienna Opening [C25]
Hoogovens, Wijk aan Zee (m/3), 15.01.1971

1.e4 d6 2.♘c3 e5 3.g3 f5 4.d3 ♘f6 5.♗g2 ♘c6 6.f4 exf4 7.♗xf4 fxe4 8.♘xe4 ♘xe4 9.♗xe4 ♕e7 10.♘e2 ♗g4 11.h3 ♗h5 12.♕d2 d5 13.♗xd5 ♘d4 14.g4 0-0-0 15.♗g5 ♕e5 16.♗xd8 ♕xd5 17.0-0-0 ♕xa2 18.♘c3 ♕a1+ 19.♘b1 ♗d6 20.♗g5 ♘b5



21.gxh5?

21.♖df1 ♘a3? (21...♗g6 is better) 22.bxa3 ♗xa3+ 23.♔d1 ♕xb1+ 24.♔e2.

In June 2021 the engines claim that 21.♖de1! is even better; 21...♘a3? loses here too, while after

21...♗g6 White has 22.♗e7.

21...♘a3 22.♕c3 ♘xb1 23.♕b3 ♘c3+ 24.♔d2 ♘xd1 25.♕b5 ♕xb2 26.♕f5+ ♔b8 27.♔xd1 ♕b1+ 28.♗c1 ♖f8 29.♖e1 b6 30.♕d7 ♔b7 31.♕a4 ♗b4 32.♖e4 ♖f1+ 33.♔e2 ♕xc1

0–1

“He commented the diagram on the staircase of the Club Argentino de Ajedrez (the second oldest chess club of Latin America still in function) just about 30 seconds after we had been introduced by Miguel Angel Quinteros like it was a position he had been looking at the whole day. This after a difficult game against Petrosian a couple of hours before. It was astonishing!” (Van Riemsdijk in his Facebook page).

Krabbé further related: “Over the next few days, Van Riemsdijk met Quinteros and Fischer a few more times.”

After winning his match with Spassky, and becoming World Champion in 1972, Fischer said that his opponent for the title in 1975 most probably would be Spassky again, but it seems he had a different opinion in 1971.

According to Krabbé, Van Riemsdijk remembers Fischer saying that he would definitely beat Spassky and he thought his real opponent in the future would be Karpov. “But Karpov, then 20, still had to learn, and Fischer showed a few positions where Karpov had made mistakes. Quinteros and Van Riemsdijk couldn’t follow it; Fischer was too fast.”

I asked about it to Van Riemsdijk, again, and he corroborated Fischer´s prediction about Karpov.

SION TECN
CAJA
DE AHORROS

Fischer watching Oscar Panno's game at the Pan American Team Championship, San Miguel de Tucumán 1971. Courtesy of LA GACETA of Tucumán

Show in Text Mode

1972

World Championship Final

Reykjavik, July 1972

Much has been written, including many books, about what happened in the “Match of the Century.” After many twists and turns, on the 11th of July 1972, the contest began, nine days after the agreed date.

What happened in the first two games is very well known. In the first Fischer played 29...♗xh2?, sacrificing his bishop for two pawns. After the adjournment Fischer was unable to hold the ending and the game finished with a win for Spassky.

Fischer blamed that defeat on the disturbing presence of cameras in the playing room, and he began to make demands. He failed to show up for the second game and the match was scored at 2–0 to Spassky, which seemed conclusive.

The third game was eventually played, without spectators and without cameras. In this crucial battle Fischer defeated Spassky for the first time.

Game 55

A surprising idea

Fischer’s first ever win against Spassky was with Black and using the Modern Benoni Defence. Although Fischer had previously used this risky system, it was not his main defence, but as he was losing 2–0 he was obliged to take risks.

This was one of the reasons for Fischer’s success in the match (the main one was simply that he was the stronger player) the fact that he included new or relatively new defences and variations in his repertoire, against which Spassky was almost “disarmed.”

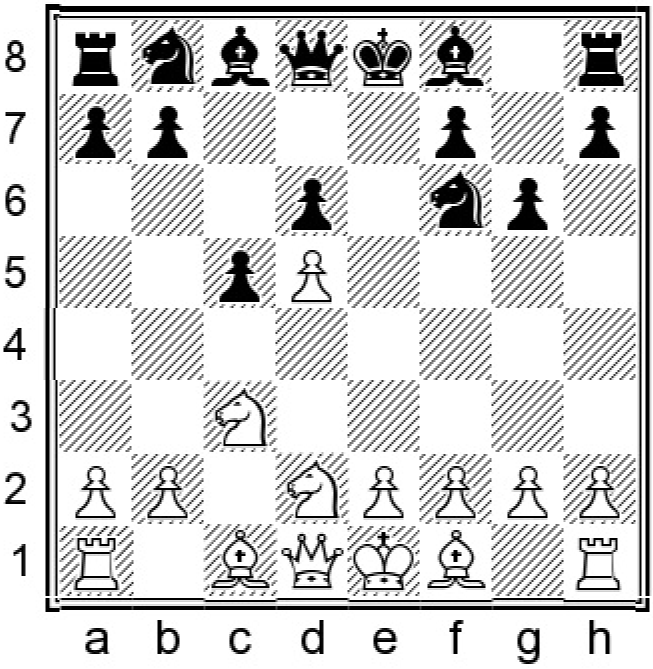
In addition, the strategic resource Fischer employed on move 11 in this game came as a huge surprise.

Boris Spassky
Robert Fischer
Modern Benoni Defence [A77]
World Championship, Reykjavík (3), 16.07.1972

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘f3 c5

As we have indicated, several times in this match Fischer played a variation that he had never, or only rarely, employed before. Even with the white pieces there were occasions when he varied from his favourite 1.e4 (“best by test” according to Fischer) in favour of playing 1.d4 setups, (via 1.c4, apparently to prevent the Queen’s Gambit Accepted, which Spassky often played), which he had never played before.

4.d5 exd5 5.cxd5 d6 6.♘c3 g6 7.♘d2



7...♘bd7

Question: This move order isn’t the most common one, is it? What’s the purpose of it?

Show/Hide Solution

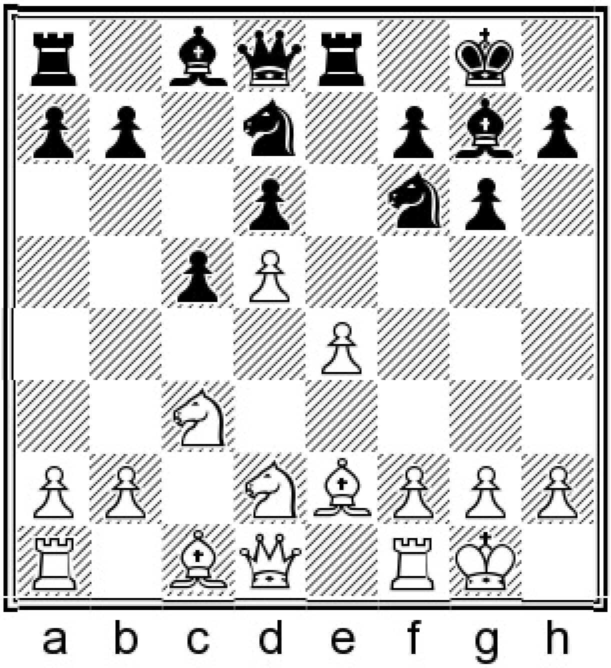
Answer: You’re right, although in this game it soon transposes to one of the main lines; one idea of the move order employed by Spassky is to continue after 7...♗g7 with 8.♘c4 0-0 9.♗f4 ♘e8 10.♕d2, which was considered dubious for Black.

But now if 8.♘c4 Black has 8...♘b6.

8.e4

With this move the game transposes to what was the main line in those days. By provoking ...♘bd7, Spassky has avoided two lines that Fischer had previously played against the usual move order of 7.e4 ♗g7 8.♘f3, namely the system with ...♗g4 and the one with ...♘a6.

8...♗g7 9.♗e2 0-0 10.0-0 ♖e8



11.♕c2

A typical move; the queen defends the e4-pawn to liberate d2-knight.

Kasparov considered that this move gave Black more options than Petrosian’s favourite 11.a4, which Gligorić had already played against Fischer in Palma de Mallorca 1970, where play continued 11...♘e5 12.♕c2 g5, stabilising the knight on e5, an idea which was a novelty at the time; the continuation was 13.♘f3 ♘xf3+ 14.♗xf3 h6 15.♗d2 a6 16.♗e2, and here, instead of 16...♗d7, “Bobby conceives a risky – and provocative! – raid” (Kasparov) with 16...♕e7, and after 17.♖ae1! ♕e5?! 18.♔h1, with the idea of f4, and White gained the better position, but following a faulty combination by Gligorić the game ended in Black’s favour.

Subsequently, instead of 13.♘f3, Gligorić played with success the plan of 13.b3, followed by ♗b2 and ♖ae1.

Question: The move ...g5 looks rather dubious, doesn’t it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: We’ll let Kasparov provide the answer: he analysed the plan with 12...g5 deeply some years later in a training match with Magerramov and they reached the conclusion that White can retain some advantage. “But at the start of the 1970s the play on the dark squares appeared rather promising for Black, which attracted Fischer with his very concrete approach to the solving of opening (and also other) problems. This was a step forward: in the era of Botvinnik, Smyslov and

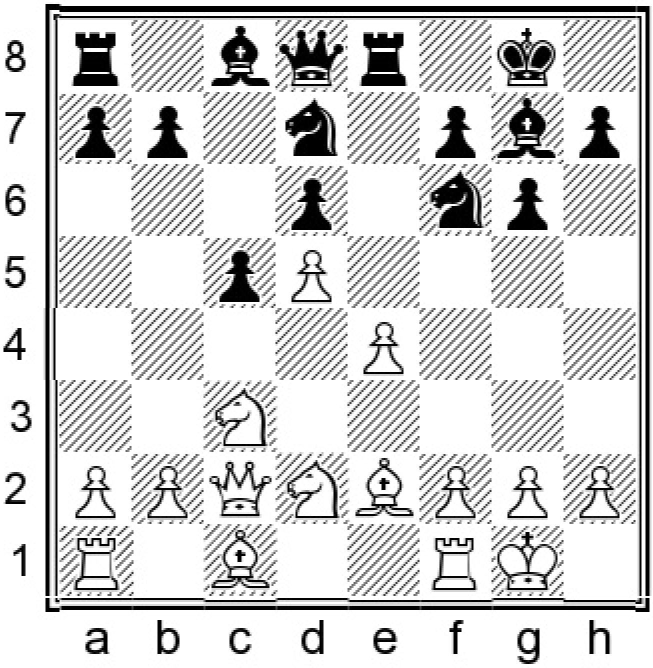
Petrosian the ...g6-g5 advance, creating a chronic weaknesses on the light squares, could not even have been conceived.”

Question: I understand, but I’m left wondering why Kasparov said that 11.a4 was more precise.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: 11.a4 is a useful move, naturally anticipating Black’s expansion with ...b5, but the main reason is that places obstacles in the way of the idea which Fischer employed in the game; if 11...♘e5 then 12.♖a3, and after 12...b6 13.♕c2 ♘h5!? (the Fischer plan) 14.♗xh5 gxh5 15.♘d1! ♗a6 White can now sacrifice the exchange with 16.♖h3! under very favourable conditions.

But let’s get back to the game.



11...♘h5

Since my youth I have engraved on my memory a comment made about this game in the Club Argentino de Ajedrez in Buenos Aires, “With Fischer everything is possible: even double pawns on the h-file!”.

The moved caused a huge stir, and even today there is no agreement about its strength. Kasparov considers it interesting, while Timman commented that it is not played in the best circumstances, because the black rook is on e8 rather than f8, where it would lend more force to a timely ...f5.

The idea had already been played in the USSR and shortly before, in a similar position, in Ljubojević - Timman in Amsterdam 1972, but of course it didn’t attract so much attention.

Instead of this move Kasparov suggested 11...♘b6, played by Mecking, with the thematic threat

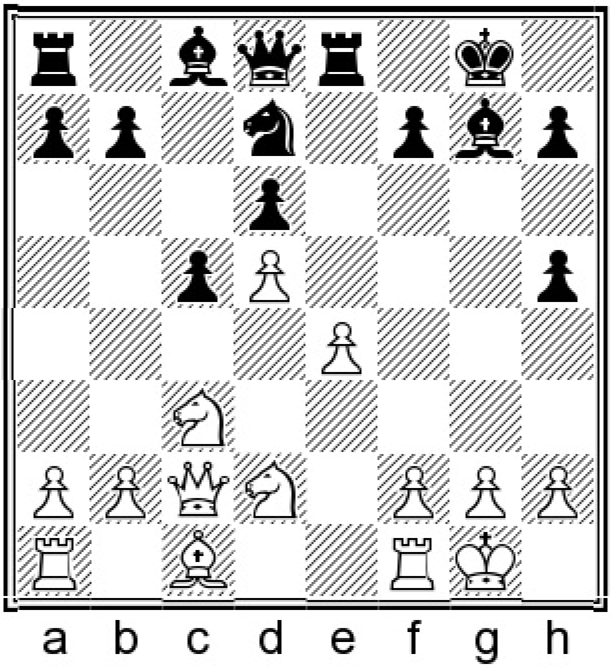
12...♘fxd5; 11...♘e5 became the most popular move subsequently, after which 12.b3, with the idea of ♗b2, was seen in a more recent game, Aronian - Caruana, Moscow 2016.

12.♗xh5

Played after thinking for twenty-five minutes; it's the most logical move and seems to be best.

On 12.g3 the response 12...♘e5 is satisfactory, while 12.f4 ♗d4+ 13.♔h1 is much more complex, and now 13...♘df6 is preferable to 13...♕h4 14.♗xh5 ♕xh5 15.♘b5.

12...gxh5



13.♘c4

With a4 played White would have a more concrete manoeuvre to punish Black for the doubled pawns, as we have already seen; now both 13.b3 and 13.a4 are considered better, with the idea of replying to 13...♘e5 with 14.b3 or 14.♘d1.

After 13.a4 ♘e5 14.♘d1! the knight goes to e3, to strengthen White's grip on c4 and f5, while in this game "... this role was assigned to the wrong knight." (Gligorić).

With 13.a4 there is also the possibility of activating the a1-rook via the third rank, as we have seen.

13...♘e5 14.♘e3

Controlling the f5-square; Timman suggested exchanging the strong black knight; after 14.♘xe5 ♗xe5 15.♗e3, 15...f5?! is inadvisable in view of 16.f4! ♗xc3 17.♕xc3 ♖xe4 18.♖f3, with a strong initiative to White.

Instead Black can try 15...♕h4, provoking 16.g3, which would prevent the transfer of the white rook along the third rank; on the other hand if 16.f4 Black can now play 16...♗xc3 17.♕xc3 (not 17.bxc3?! ♗f5!) 17...♖xe4, since he can respond to 18.♖f3 with 18...♗g4 19.♖g3 ♕e7, not fearing 20.h3 due to 20...f5! when White must play 21.♗f2 to be able to retreat the rook after the imminent 21...h4, which would win in the event of 21.hxg4 (21...h4).

Exercise: How did Fischer continue here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

14...♕h4!

"Mainly due to the absence of White's light-squared bishop, Black has a dangerous kingside initiative." (Timman).

15.♗d2

Spassky restricts himself to continuing with his development, but this gives Black to much freedom.

15.f4 ♘g4 16.♘xg4 hxg4 17.f5? is inappropriate due to 17...♗d4+!, followed by 18...♗e5.

15.f3 is more promising, as is 15.♘e2, given by Timman, with the idea of answering 15...♘g4 16.♘xg4 hxg4 with 17.♘g3, controlling h5 and f5.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer reply to 15.♗d2?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

15...♘g4

Of course; Black is able to repair his structure.

There was nothing else; the optimistic 15...♘f3+? 16.gxf3 ♗e5 achieves nothing after 17.♖fe1 ♕xh2+ 18.♔f1 ♗g3 19.♘ed1, with a decisive advantage.

16.♘xg4

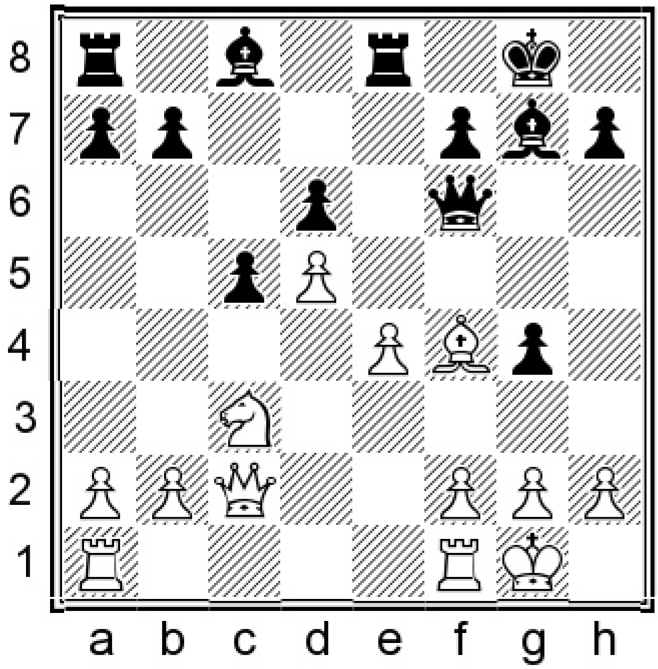
16.h3 is no better in view of 16...♘xe3 17.♗xe3 ♗d7, threatening to take on c3 and then on e4, while if 18.f3 then 18...b5.

16...hxg4 17.♗f4

Preventing Black’s idea of 17...♗e5 18.g3 ♕f6, putting pressure on the white position.

Smyslov suggested 17.♘e2, preparing ♘g3 and then ♗c3, to leave White with a knight that should be stronger than Black’s light-squared bishop, but instead of the manoeuvre 17...♗f5–g6 which he suggested, it seems better to play 17...f5, opening up the game, after which the black bishop would not be inferior to White’s knight.

17...♕f6



18.g3?

A move that was universally criticised; White’s structure loses mobility; instead, 18.♗g3 was suggested, with the idea of opening up the kingside with f3.

18...♗d7 19.a4

Exercise: How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19...b6

Initiating the typical idea of queenside expansion; the plan is 20...a6 and ...b5; playing 19...a6 immediately would allow 20.a5.

20.♖fe1

Spassky would like to play the typical e5-break to neutralise Black’s offensive.

20...a6 21.♖e2

Exercise: How did Fischer continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21...b5!

Question: This looks obvious, doesn’t it? So why the exclamation mark?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: General ideas are not enough; it’s important that a continuation works tactically. This advance allows White to play a subsequent e4-e5 but Fischer has seen this wasn’t to be feared, as after 22.axb5?! axb5 23.♖xa8 ♖xa8 advancing with 24.e5? is bad, in view of 24...♖a1+ 25.♔g2 dxe5 26.♖xe5 (26.♗xe5 allows mate) 26...b4, and Black gains a decisive advantage, for instance 27.♘e4 loses to 27...♕a6!, and 27.♘e2 to 27...♕g6!.

22.♖ae1

Logically White shouldn’t open the file if it fails to achieve anything concrete.

Exercise: How did Fischer respond?

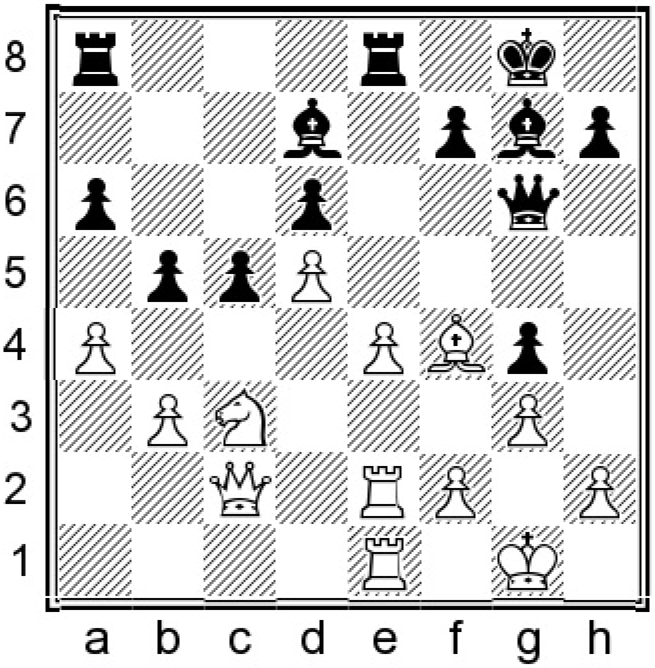
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22...♕g6!

Hindering the e5-advance.

23.b3



23...♖e7

This logical move is inaccurate in Timman’s opinion, for tactical reasons. Black would like to increase the pressure on e4 with ...♖ae8, but Timman thought it was better to play 23...♖ac8! (also the top choice of Stockfish in early 2021), preparing the advances ...c4 and/or ...b4. Then if White continues as in the game with 24.♕d3? Black can play the strong 24...c4! 25.bxc4 ♖xc4, and the white position collapses; instead Timman considered 24.♕d2 to be best, but then 24...♖e7 can be played without White having available the manoeuvre that he was able to carry out in the game.

24.♕d3

The first step of a plan to neutralise the mobility of the black pawns.

24...♖b8

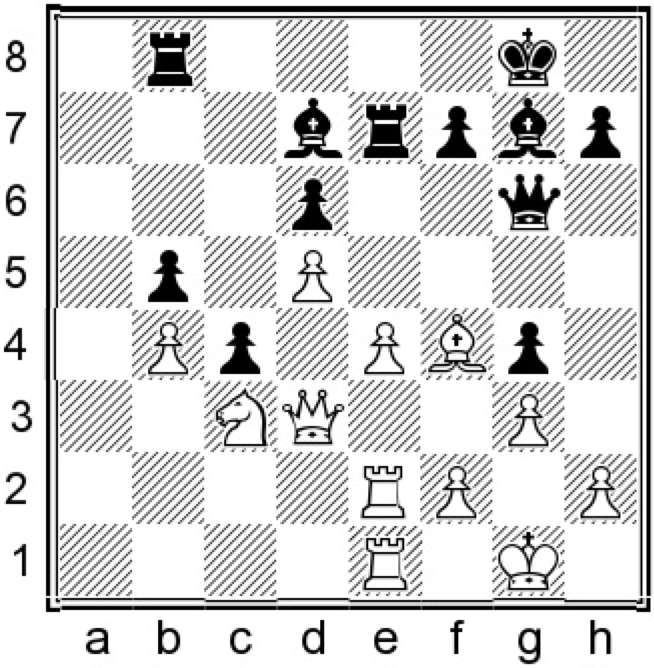
Another possibility was 24...bxa4 25.bxa4 ♖b8, preventing the manoeuvre White plays in the game. It’s quite possible that Fischer had no interest in preventing it, because the resulting position is still good for Black.

25.axb5 axb5 26.b4

With this typical advance, parrying the threat of 26...b4, White deprives the black pawns of flexibility.

26...c4

Forced, as 26...cxb4 27.♘a2 ♖c8 28.♘xb4 achieves little.



Question: I’d like you to explain this more clearly. Why was Fischer not concerned about preventing this possibility?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: It shouldn’t be forgotten that Black now has a passed pawn and e4 remains weak, so the advantage remains on his side.

27.♕d2

Exercise: What did Fischer play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

27...♖be8

Of course; Fischer returns to the plan begun on move 23; now the capture of the e4-pawn is almost inevitable.

28.♖e3

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

28...h5!

“Fischer improves his position first before he wins the e4-pawn, which in any event cannot run away.” (Müller).

With this advance the black king has the h7-square h7 at his disposal, which might be useful later on.

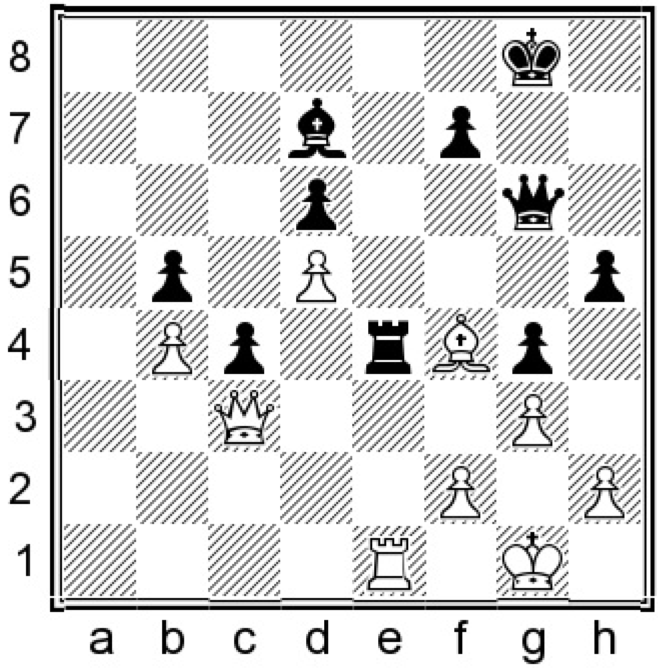
29.♖3e2 ♔h7 30.♖e3 ♔g8

The repetition of moves changes nothing; the best location for the black king is g8.

31.♖3e2 ♗xc3

There is no way for Black to improve his position further, so Black captures White’s centre pawn.

32.♕xc3 ♖xe4 33.♖xe4 ♖xe4



34.♖xe4

Perhaps it would have been better to keep a rook to try to counterattack against the black king, whose position has also been weakened. After 34.♖a1 Black would have still had to search for a way to win. Nevertheless, with his d5-pawn weak, his king unsafe, and with a black passed pawn c4, defending White’s position would have been an unenviable task.

34...♕xe4 35.♗h6

Forcing the black queen to retreat. Instead, 35.♗xd6? ♕xd5 would open the long diagonal in Black’s favour, while 35.♕f6 ♕b1+ 36.♔g2 ♗f5 would lead to something similar to the game.

35...♕g6 36.♗c1

Exercise: What did Fischer play now?

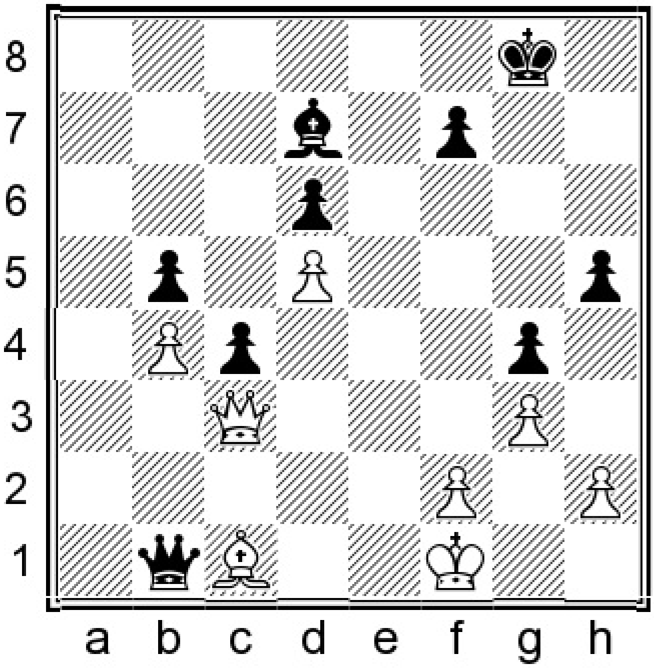
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

36...♕b1!

Parrying the threat of ♗b2.

37.♔f1



Exercise (simple): What now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

37...♗f5

Following the inclusion of the bishop in the attack, White's defensive task becomes more and more difficult; the bishops of opposite colour favour the attacking side, as is usually the case.

38.♔e2 ♕e4+ 39.♕e3 ♕c2+

Of course, not 39...♕xd5? 40.♕g5+, with a draw.

40.♕d2?!

This is not the most tenacious move but it was the last move of the time scramble. Now Black's task is easier.

As Timman pointed out, 40.♔e1 was more resilient; after 40...c3 41.♕g5+ ♗g6 42.♕e3, "Black will find it hard to make further progress, as his king won't find safety anywhere."

No doubt Black would have had more practical difficulties in that case, but the game would have been adjourned and very possibly Fischer, after a precise analysis of the ending, would have come to the same conclusion as the current engines, i.e. that the black position is winning, beginning for example with 42...f6, precisely to give the black king more cover, preventing a check on g5. White is then almost paralysed and would have difficulty in holding the position due to the factors already mentioned: the insecurity of his monarch, his weaknesses on b4 and d5 and the strength of Black's passed pawn; in any case, the engines of early 2021 see no defence for White.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

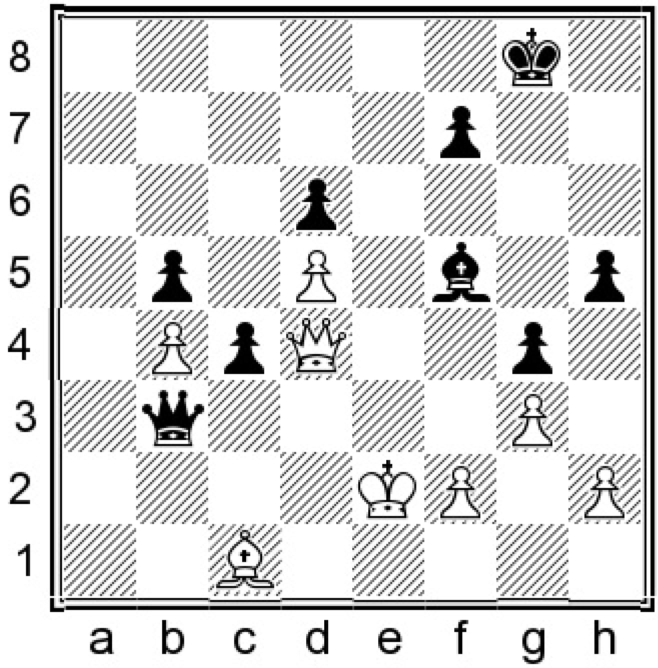
Answer:

40...♕b3!

Now there is no time for 41.♗b2 in view of 41...♕f3+ 42.♔e1 ♕h1+ 43.♔e2 ♗d3+, mating or winning the queen.

41.♕d4

41.♔e1 fails to hold the position, due, among other things, to the obvious 41...c3 and ...c2, and once again the passed pawn, combined with the vulnerability of the white monarch and the weakness of the pawns on b4 and d5, make White's defence impossible, for instance 42.♕d4 c2 43.♗b2 f6 44.♕xf6 ♕xb4+ 45.♔e2 ♕c4+, soon mating.



Here the position was adjourned and Fischer sealed his move.

Exercise: What move did Fischer place in the envelope?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

41...♗d3+!

Spassky resigned, on seeing that this was the sealed move; on 42.♔e3 Black wins with 42...♕d1!, (attacking the bishop and threatening mate, beginning with 43...♕f3+) and after 43.♕b2 Black has mate in four: 43...♕f3+ 44.♔d4 (or 44.♔d2 ♕e2+) 44...♕e4+ 45.♔c3 ♕e1+! and 46...♕e5++.

Only then did Fischer gain his first victory over Spassky.

0–1

In the fourth game, Spassky, with Black, had the initiative and was close to winning, but it ended in a draw. Bondarevsky commented: "It is possible that Black had no concrete way to win. This question demands a special study. At any event, in my opinion few grandmasters would have withstood Black's pressure and saved the game."

Game 56

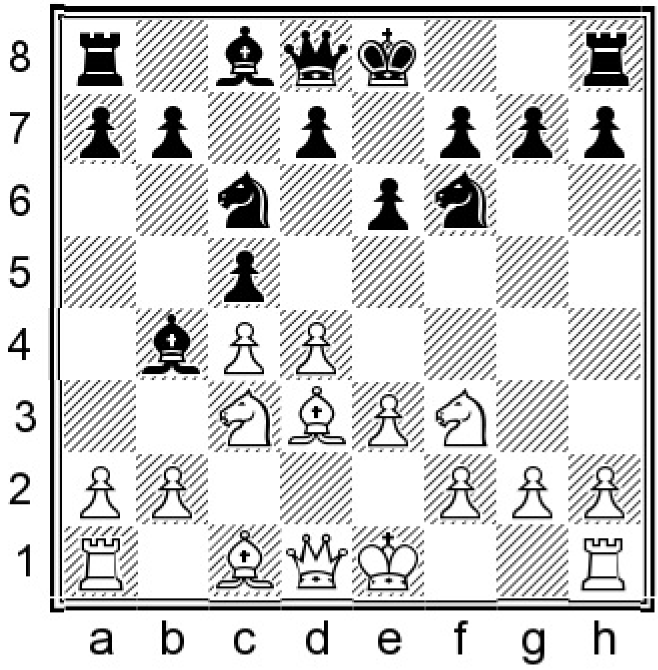
"Always kept a keen eye on the latest achievements of theory"

That comment by Kasparov about Fischer explains the way the fifth game of the match developed, with Fischer employing for the first and only time the Hübner Variation of the Nimzo-Indian Defence. This line started to be popular largely thanks to Robert Hübner's successes in the two preceding years, then this game and later games by Jan Timman made this line hugely popular in the 1970s and 1980s.

Fischer had a preference for bishops, but in the variation he chose for this game the most important pieces are the knights. Kasparov made this comment about this game: "The ease with which Black solved his opening problems and then won the game made an enormous impression on his contemporaries!".

Boris Spassky
Robert Fischer
Nimzo-Indian Defence [E41]
World Championship, Reykjavík (5), 20.07.1972

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♗b4 4.♘f3 c5 5.e3 ♘c6 6.♗d3



6...♗xc3+

The idea starts with this move; Black exchanges the bishop without any provocation in order to double the pawns, followed by placing his centre pawns on the colour of the bishop that has been exchanged. The tempo “given away” is of little importance, due to the closed character of the position.

7.bxc3 d6 8.e4 e5 9.d5 ♘e7

This is another essential part of the plan; previously it was more common to place the knight on a5, putting pressure on c4, frequently with the idea of continuing with ...b6 and ...♗a6; the new idea of this variation is that the knight heads for the kingside instead.

Now if 10.0-0 “the most logical is 10...♘g6!” (Kasparov), for example 11.♘e1 0-0 12.g3 ♗h3 13.♘g2 ♘e8, Gligorić - Timman, Bled 1979, “with a comfortable game.” (Kasparov).

10.♘h4

This is an idea of Keres, designed to reply to 10...♘g6 with 11.♘f5, and with the further plans of ♗g5 or f4.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

10...h6!

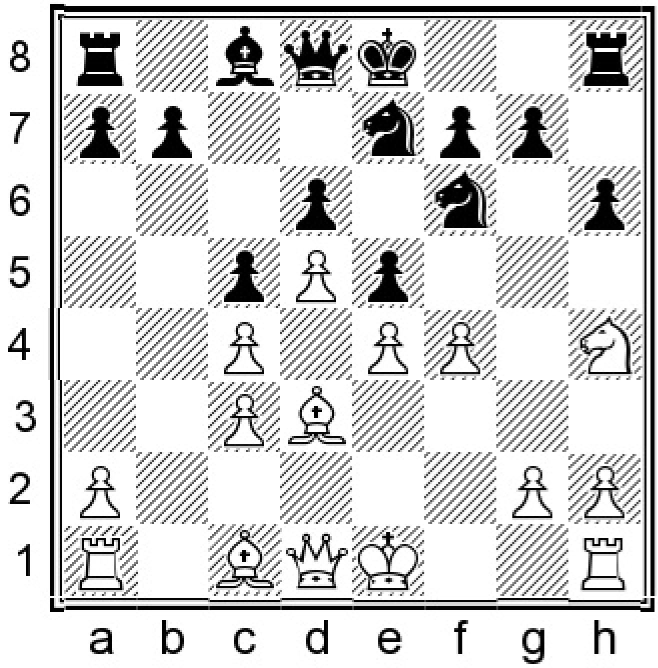
“This move (with the idea of ...g7-g5) first occurred in the game Gligorić - Hübner, Hastings 1968/69.” (Kasparov).

11.f4

A novelty, after thinking for 25 minutes.

More usual was 11.f3 g5 (or interpolating 11...♕a5 12.♗d2 and now 12...g5, Donner - Portisch, Wijk aan Zee 1972) 12.♘f5 ♘xf5.

The above-mentioned first game with 10...h6 continued 11.0-0 g5 12.♕f3 ♘fg8 (12...♘h7 13.♘f5 ♘xf5 14.exf5 ♗d7, played in Vaganian - Short, Horgen 1995 is also acceptable) 13.♘f5 ♘xf5 14.exf5 ♕f6, and Black obtained a reasonable position; in this line 14...♘f6 is also appropriate, with the idea of responding to 15.♕e2 with a king manoeuvre which is frequently seen in this structure, 15...♔d7 16.f3 ♕a5 17.♕c2 ♔c7, Mecking - Langeweg, Wijk aan Zee 1971.



Exercise: How did Fischer reply to the Spassky's novelty?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

11...♘g6!

"An excellent positional idea by Fischer. To maintain the blockade Black is prepared to allow a worsening of his pawn structure." (Taimanov).

This is not the first idea which comes to mind.

Exercise: Why did Fischer reject the obvious 11...exf4 12.♗xf4 g5?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Because the advance 13.e5! would have given White a strong initiative; the black king in the centre stands very badly, e.g. 13...♘g4 14.e6! ♘f6 and as well as the advantageous line indicated by Timman, 15.♗g3 gxh4 16.♗xh4, with a very strong attack, the current engines gives 15.0-0, with an even greater advantage.

After 13...♘d7 14.exd6 ♘g8 (if 14...gxf4 then both 15.0-0 and 15.♕e2 are strong) 15.♕e2+ ♔f8, in addition to 16.♗e5 (Timman), the engines of the 21st century recommend the crushing move 16.0-0!, with a position reminiscent of a 19th century King's Gambit!

12.♘xg6 fxg6

Question: But the black structure has been irreparably damaged; why then is this good for Black?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Let’s leave the explanation to Mikhail Tal: “Behind his doubled pawns Black’s king will be very comfortably placed, and the c3- and c4- pawns are no adornment to White’s position.”

13.fxe5?!

A move criticised unanimously; it isn’t advantageous to resolve the structure yet.

As Kasparov indicated, the fact is subsequently that White failed to achieve much either after 13.0-0 0-0, and here White tried 14.♖b1, 14.♕e1 and 14.f5, to which the best reply is 14...b5!.

With the move played Spassky plans to profit from the opening of the f-file, which explains of his next few moves.

13...dxe5 14.♗e3

A move also criticised by Tal and Timman, among others.

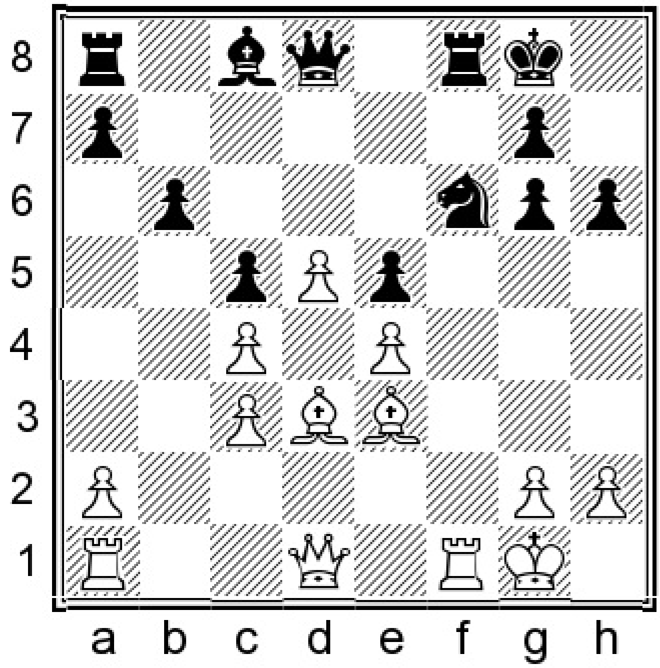
Question: It’s a logical developing move, so why was it criticised?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Kasparov thought the criticism was somewhat unjust, because “although it is clear that in the given instance the nominally developing move ♗e3 is superfluous,” White no has better lines or ideas that promise him any advantage.

Polugaevsky suggested 14.a4, move which we shall see later, while Timman recommended 14.0-0 0-0 15.♗d2, but this wasn’t the idea of playing 13.fxe5 and it isn’t a clear improvement.

14...b6 15.0-0 0-0



16.a4?!

Question: How can this be dubious? This is a standard move, seeking to open lines with a5 or create a weakness on b6.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: I'll reply by setting you a task...

Exercise: ...demonstrate that this move isn't appropriate here.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

16...a5!

"Now there is nowhere for White to break through, the weakness at a4 is fixed, and the weakness of the b6-square is not felt." (Kasparov).

17.♖b1 ♗d7 18.♖b2 ♖b8 19.♖bf2

This was the idea of 13.fxe5, and the reason why the bishop was on e3 and not d2.

This was another move that received criticism and 19.♗c2 was suggested, to be followed by

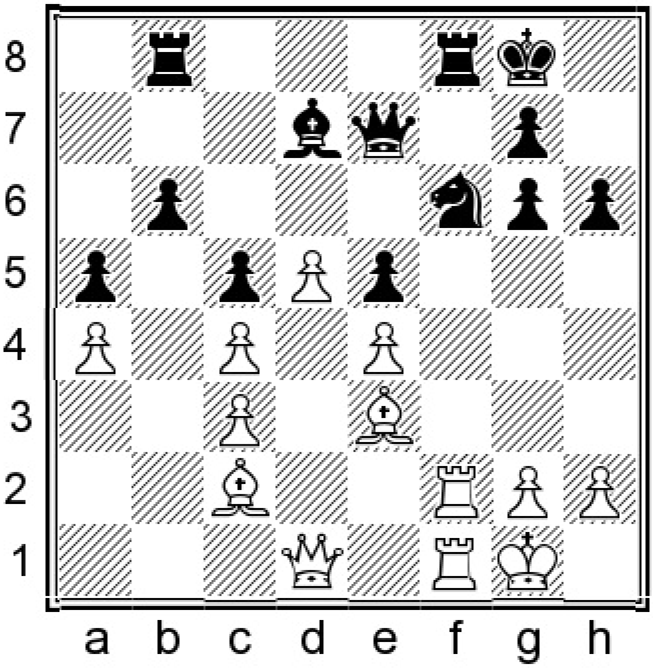
20.♕b1, trying to prevent Black from making progress.

Question: Was this a much better idea?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: No, it doesn't seem much better; perhaps it would have been objectively a slight improvement, but of course such a defensive approach would not satisfy Spassky.

19...♕e7 20.♗c2



Black's advantage is minimal, but as Bondarevsky indicated in *Russians versus Fischer*, "This game is very typical of Fischer, He is always glad when he manages to stabilise the situation with a minimal positional advantage. In such games he is ready to play for hours and he is good at solving problems that facing him."

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20...g5!

"Black gradually strengthens his position" (Kasparov); this is the first step.

21.♗d2

Exercise: What is the second step?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21...♕e8!

Another improvement; the queen goes to g6 to put pressure on e4.

22.♗e1 ♕g6 23.♕d3

Exercise: The position is only a bit more pleasant for Black, and it looks as though a long struggle is in prospect. How did Fischer try to make progress now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23...♘h5!

Question: Really? Exchanging the rooks represents progress?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: It's not ideal, but there's no way to improve the position without exchanging the rooks. For a piece exchange to provide an advantage, the pieces which remain on the board must be better than those of the opponent. That's true in this case, as we shall see, so exchanging rooks is correct.

24.♖xf8+ ♖xf8 25.♖xf8+ ♔xf8

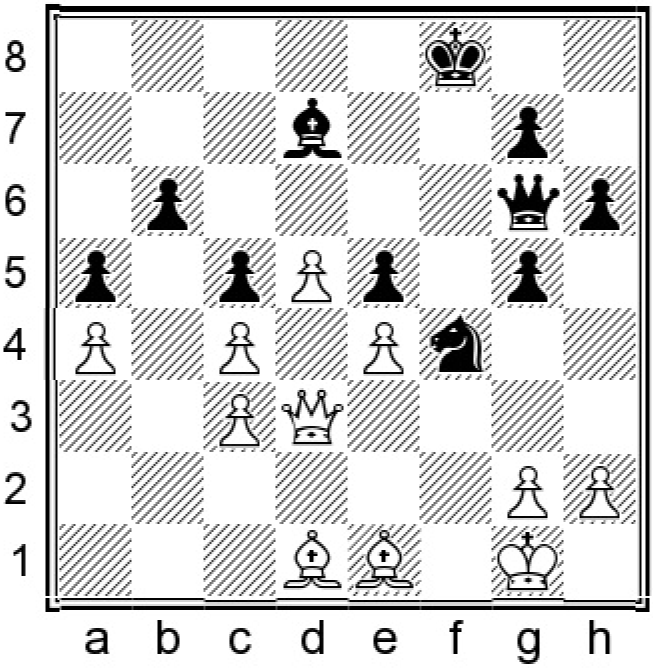
Now White must decide whether or not to allow the leap of Black's knight to f4.

26.♗d1

Spassky decides to allow it. As Timman indicated, if 26.g3?! then 26...♘f6, and Black prepares to exploit the weakness of f3 by playing ...♗g4 and ...♕h5, with the idea of ...♗f3, followed ...♕g6, when the e4-pawn will be difficult to hold.

26.♗g3 is not attractive either, as Black can play 26...♕f6, followed by ...g4 and later ...♘f4, ...g5, ...h5, etc.; there is little White can do to hinder Black from making gradual progress.

26...♘f4



27.♕c2??

And now Spassky makes a serious, blunder.

Instead, 27.♕b1 was better. In that case Black could keep improving his position. One plan is to play 27...♔e8, to bring the king a c7 and defend the b6-pawn, freeing his queen; here we can see the usefulness of having exchanged the rooks.

Timman suggested playing 27...g4 first, preventing White from playing g4. The next step would be continue advancing the kingside. Black would stand better, but there would be a long struggle ahead and it’s not clear that Black would have gained a winning advantage.

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer exploit Spassky’s blunder?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

27...♗xa4!

After 28.♕xa4 ♕xe4, with a double attack, and if 29.♔f2 then 29...♘d3+ wins.

“Spassky was out of form, but this does not detract from Fischer’s excellent play.” (Kasparov).

0–1

With this win Fischer equalised the score, and he went on to win the sixth game as well.

Game 57

When Spassky applauded Fischer

In 1970 Fischer was expecting to play board one against Spassky in the USSR – Rest of the World Match in Belgrade, and he prepared new ideas against each of the champion’s usual defences, amongst which was the Tartakower Variation of the Queen’s Gambit, which was one of Spassky’s favourite defences. Fischer even played it with Black sometimes, as we’ve seen.

The fruit of this 1970 preparation is the move 14.♗b5, played in this game, as in Belgrade Fischer played board two against Petrosian and not against Spassky. There he played 1.e4 in both games, so that the new idea didn’t come to light.

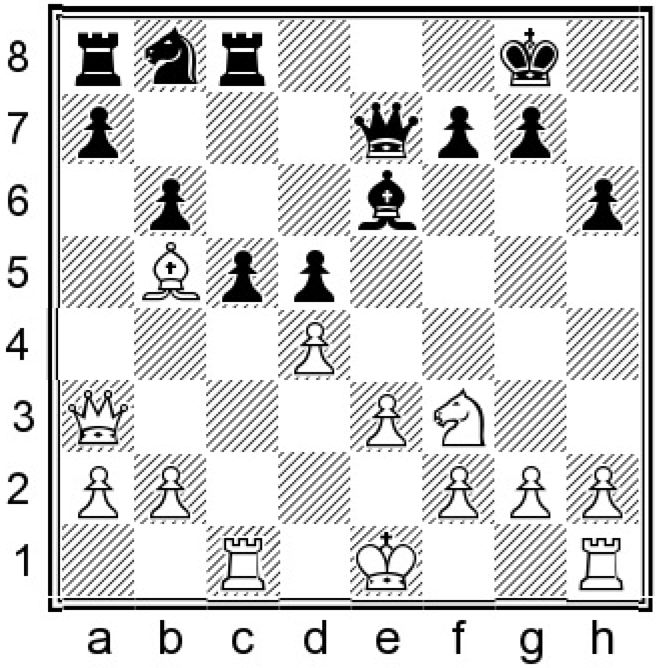
It was played in Furman - Geller, in Moscow in 1970, but apparently Spassky and his team didn’t have the best response ready, largely because they didn’t expect Fischer to play the Queen’s Gambit with White.

It proved to be a model game on Fischer’s part, the best one in the match. In a very gentlemanly gesture, rarely seen, and even less so in a World Championship, when the game was over Spassky joined in the applause of the public, congratulating Fischer on his magnificent win.

Returning to the Belgrade contest, if Fischer had played against Spassky, and if he had chosen 1.c4 or 1.d4, perhaps everything would have been different in Reykjavik in 1972, because it would no longer have been such a surprise for Fischer to play positions typical of 1.d4.

Robert Fischer
Boris Spassky
Queen’s Gambit [D59]
World Championship, Reykjavík (6), 23.07.1972

1.c4 e6 2.♘f3 d5 3.d4 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♗e7 5.♗g5 0-0 6.e3 h6 7.♗h4 b6 8.cxd5 ♘xd5 9.♗xe7 ♕xe7 10.♘xd5 exd5 11.♖c1 ♗e6 12.♕a4 c5 13.♕a3 ♖c8 14.♗b5

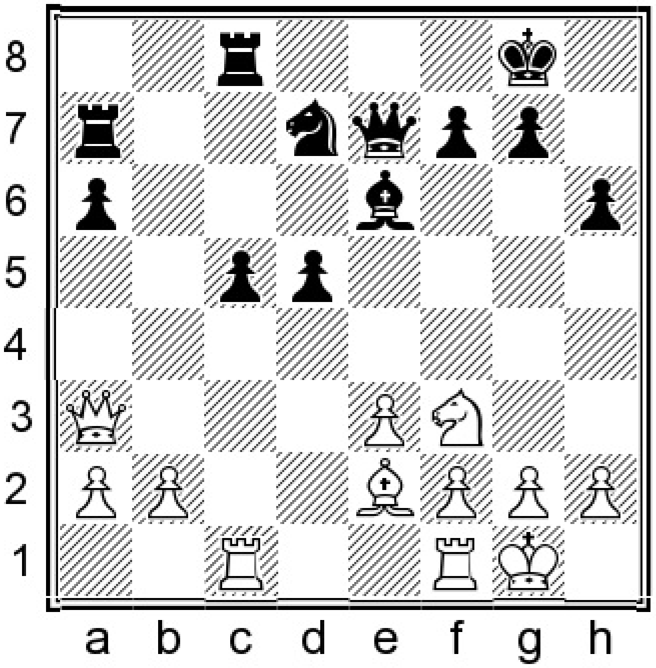


14...a6?!

This was also played by Geller against Furman in Moscow 1970; the improvement for Black came in the game Timman - Geller, Hilversum, 1973, in which Black obtained good play by sacrificing the pawn with 14...♕b7!; White accepted it, but Black then gained an overwhelming initiative after 15.dxc5 bxc5 16.♖xc5 ♖xc5 17.♕xc5 ♘a6! 18.♗xa6 ♕xa6 19.♕a3 ♕c4 20.♔d2? ♕g4 21.♖g1 d4!, winning cleanly.

15.dxc5 bxc5 16.0-0 ♖a7 17.♗e2 ♘d7

Geller preferred 17...a5, but, after another inaccuracy the new weakness on b5 proved fatal.



White to play

We've reached a typical hanging pawns position, with which Spassky had a lot of experience.

Exercise: How did Fischer try to put pressure on the enemy position?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18.♘d4!

And Black must be attentive to the possibilities of both ♘b3 and ♘xe6; if the pin stays in place, White might apply pressure to the c5-pawn with ♖c2 and ♖fc1.

18...♕f8?!

This forces the white knight to commit itself, but it leads to a passive position. Mikhail Tal thought that Spassky probably underestimated White's 20th move.

With the same idea of unpinning, 18...♘f6, suggested by Tal, was more active. Now a possible line is 19.♘xe6 fxe6 20.♖c2 ♖c6 21.♖fc1 ♖ac7, which would perhaps be slightly better for White, but tolerable.

If White prefers 19.♘b3 instead, then Black can play 19...c4 20.♕xe7 ♖xe7 21.♘d4 ♖ec7, followed by ...♔f8, with a reasonable position.

About fifteen years ago Kasparov suggested something sharper and more interesting: the "unexpected 19...♖ac7!, with the idea of the d5-d4 breakthrough" (which would take place after 20.♖fd1, for instance); the current engines still approve of this move, as the complications aren't unfavourable to Black, who naturally is unafraid of 20.♗xa6?! ♖a8 21.♖xc5 ♖ca7 22.♕b4 ♘e4!, winning material.

Exercise: What decision did Fischer make here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19.♘xe6!

An important decision, in connection with his next move.

19...fxe6

Exercise: What is the move here that Fischer planned and Spassky underestimated?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20.e4!

Tal commented: "White wants to liquidate the tension in the centre, in order then to occupy himself unhindered with the attack on the sector of the board that has attracted his attention."

This advance opens lines for the bishop and seeks to further weaken the black structure, naturally not fearing 20...dxe4, because the pawn is easily regained and the black structure is left irreparably weakened.

20...d4?!

"Unfortunately Spassky falls in with his opponent's wishes," commented Tal; we shall soon see the drawbacks of this advance.

In view of what happens it can be deduced that both 20...♘f6 and 20...c4 were preferable, "come what may."

White would still have the somewhat better chances after 20...♘f6 21.e5 ♘d7 22.♕h3 ♖c6 23.♗g4! ♕e7 24.f4, followed by an opportune f5.

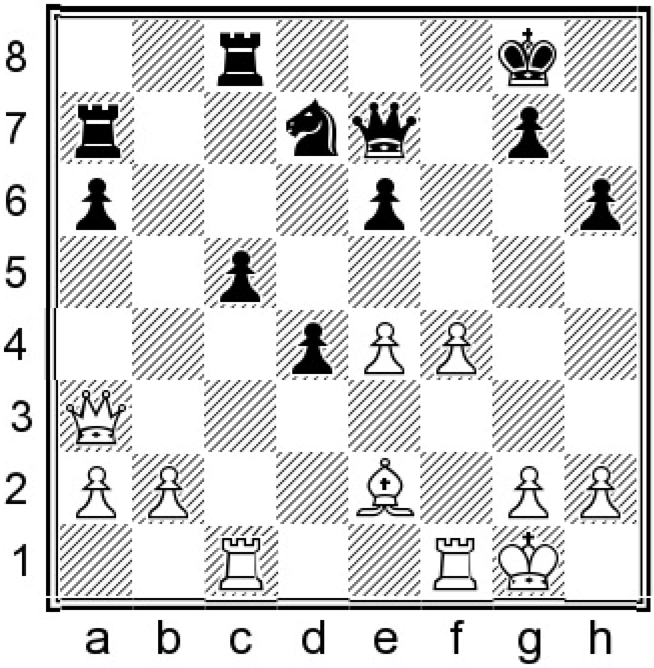
Kasparov agrees with Tal that the most tenacious continuation was to restrict the activity of the white bishop with 20...c4! 21.♕h3, and now 21...♖c6! 22.b3 ♘b6, although White has a minimal advantage after e.g. 23.exd5 exd5 24.bxc4 dxc4 25.♗f3.

Question: So, am I to understand that, even with these improvements for Black, White would still have an advantage, although only a small one?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Correct, although none of this is forced. It's always necessary to take into account the practical element. Here's Tal's response: after 20...d4, "the position now takes on an ever more technical character, all the more to Fischer's liking – a better position with no counterplay for the opponent. Perhaps all chessplayers like such situations, but Fischer really loves them."

21.f4 ♕e7



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22.e5!

“First of all White fixes the weak e6-pawn. Black’s passed pawn is totally harmless, while White’s bishop is clearly stronger than the enemy knight. White is looking forward to an attack on the kingside.” (Tal).

22...♖b8?!

Perhaps 22...♘b6 would give Black more practical chances, with the idea of going to d5 and perhaps e3, and in some cases to play ...c4; the tempting 23.f5 would not be as strong as it looks due to 23...c4! (not 23...exf5? 24.♕b3+), e.g. 24.♕a5 ♕c5 25.b4 ♕b5!, leading to unclear complications, when neither 26.a4 nor 26.fxe6 give white very much.

It’s likely that Fischer would have played 23.♕d3!, with the idea of ♕e4 and ♗d3; this the move endorsed by the current engines.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

23.♗c4

It seems so simple, doesn’t it? The threat is f5.

23...♔h8

This loses, but there was already nothing satisfactory; against 23...♘b6 there are several good lines, including 24.♕b3!, suggested by Tal, for example 24...♘d7 25.♗xe6+ (25.♕h3, among other things, also works, since if 25...♖xb2 White wins with 26.♗xe6+ ♔h8 27.♖b1!) 25...♔h8 26.♕d5 (or 26.♕h3) 26...♖xb2 27.♖b1!, and once again White achieves maximum activity for his pieces, which is impossible for Black to neutralise.

Exercise: How did Fischer proceed now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24.♕h3!

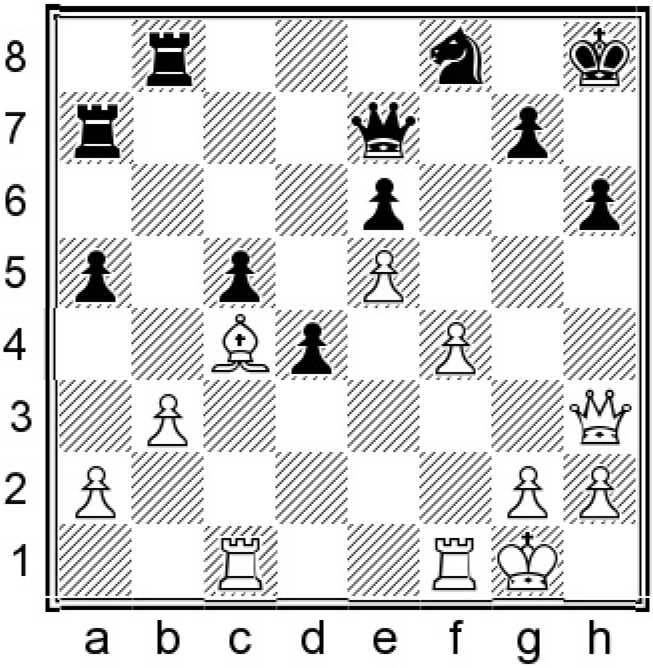
The queen heads over to the kingside, hitting e6.

24...♘f8

Now Black is completely paralysed, so Fischer unhurriedly strengthens his position, preparing for the moment to deliver the winning blows.

Instead, 24...♖xb2 would hardly have offered Black any chances of resistance; the solitary rook on the seventh rank presents no danger to White, who would be able to continue with 25.♗xe6 ♖ab7 (or 25...♘f8 26.♗c4, followed by the advance of the f- and e- pawns) 26.♖ce1, followed by f5 or even 26.f5 immediately.

25.b3 a5



Exercise: What to play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

26.f5!

The moment has arrived for the decisive attack.

“Black is unable to create counterplay. The final part of the game can serve as a textbook example of an attack on the king.” (Tal).

“The start of a model attack on the king – Bobby conducts it almost like a machine.” (Kasparov).

26...exf5 27.♖xf5

Tal commented that White’s following play is so simple and logical that it requires little explanation.

27...♘h7

Instead, 27...♘g6 would have been answered with the quiet 28.♕g3, or 28.♖cf1, but you always need to be on your guard - here, for instance, 28.♖f7? would spoil everything, due to the counter-blow 28...♕g5!, and White loses the e5-pawn.

Exercise: What now? What did Fischer play here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

28.♖cf1

He brings the last piece into the attack; of course, not 28.♖f7?? ♘g5.

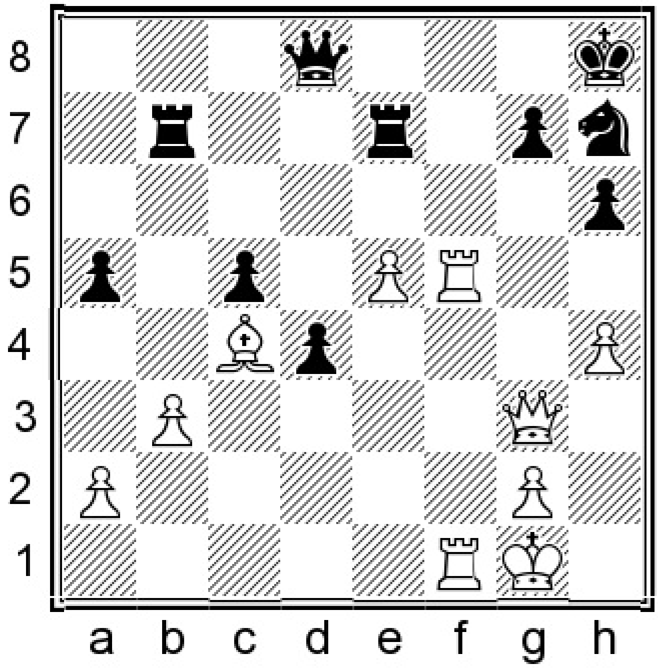
28...♕d8 29.♕g3

There are other winning moves, such as 29.e6, but Fischer prefers to optimise all his pieces before advancing the e-pawn.

29...♖e7 30.h4

Depriving the knight of the g5-square; 31.♖f7 is now a threat.

30...♖bb7



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

31.e6!

Now, when there is no further way to improve his pieces, he advances the pawn.

“Under the cover of the e6-pawn White can regroup at will, unhurriedly taking aiming at the most vulnerable point of the black position - the h7-square.” (Tal).

31...♖bc7 32.♕e5 ♕e8

If 32...d3 then 33.♖d1, while if 32...♘f6 then White wins with 33.♖xf6! gxf6 34.♖xf6 ♔h7 35.♕h5.

33.a4

Question: It’s this precaution necessary? Isn’t it quicker to focus on the attack?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: No, this move wasn’t necessary, but neither is it a mistake.

Tal commented that this was one of Fischer's characteristics. Since he faces no real opposition now and there is no need to rush, he doesn't even want to leave Black the possibility of playing ...a4, although in this position it was nothing to be afraid of.

33...♕d8 34.♖1f2 ♕e8 35.♖2f3 ♕d8

Exercise: What did Fischer play now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

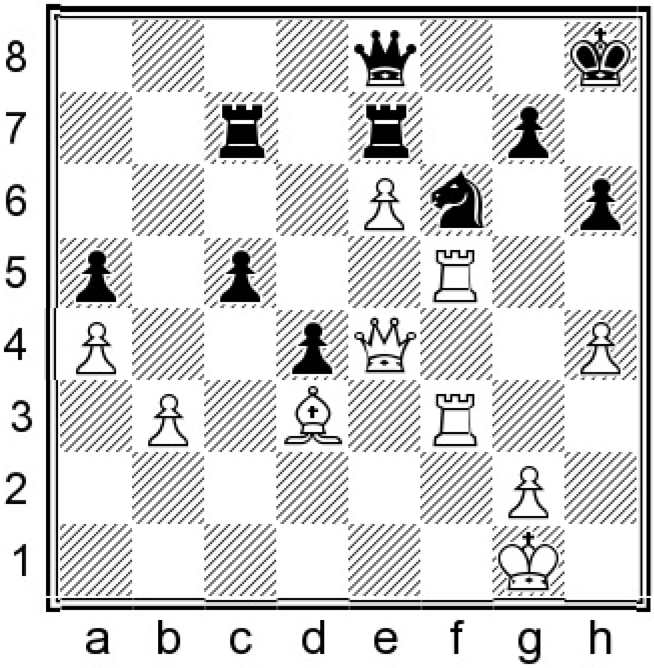
36.♗d3

As Tal pointed out, "the bishop has already done enough work along the a2-g8 diagonal and now takes up a new position;" Fischer proceeds with the plan mentioned by Tal, to exploit weakness of the h7-square.

36.♖f7 and 36.♖h5 were also winning.

36...♕e8 37.♕e4 ♘f6

Of course, if 37...♖xe6 White wins with 38.♖f8+! ♘xf8 39.♖xf8+, and mate next move.



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

38.♖xf6!

With the same finish that we saw in one of the lines above; the black king is left defenceless.

38...gxf6 39.♖xf6 ♔g8 40.♗c4

There are other winning moves, such as 40.♖xh6 or 40.♕f4, but Fischer prefers to retain all his options, first tying the black rook to e7.

40...♔h8 41.♕f4

1–0

As we said, this game was considered by a great majority of the masters to be the best of the match. Miguel Najdorf, who attended all the big events, compared it to a Mozart symphony.

With this win Fischer took over the lead and in the next six games his lead was increased.

After the marathon 13th game, which lasted nine and a half hours, Fischer moved on to 8–5 and only needed 4½ points from the remaining 11 games to win the match.

Everything suggested that at that moment Fischer decided to take no more risks and to approach the challenge relatively cautiously; the next seven games all ended in draws. Fischer kept changing his openings and all the games were very complicated struggles.

After the contest was over, Fischer commented that "in the second part of the match he played very well. I felt that I was really under enormous pressure in the later games. Except for the very last two or three."

The twenty-first game, with the score now 11½ – 8½ in Fischer's favour, began on the 31st of August, and was adjourned with Fischer having the upper hand. Spassky failed to seal the best move and the game was lost.

Brady commented: "The next day, Harry Benson, a Scotsman who was a key photographer for *Time Life*, met Spassky at the Saga Hotel, 'There is a new champion,' Spassky said. 'I'm not sad. It's a sporting event and I lost. Bobby's the new champion. Now I have must take a walk and get some fresh air."

Benson went at once to the Loftleidir Hotel and gave Fischer the good news.

Fischer had proved himself the best, and by winning 12½ – 8½, he became the eleventh World Champion.

A new and better phase seemed to be opening up. Fischer said he wanted to defend his title every year. At the closing ceremony, the possibility of a return match in 1973 in Las Vegas was discussed. Fischer was welcomed back to the USA as a national hero. The President Richard Nixon sent him a telegram of congratulations, inviting him to the White House. The new champion was going to create a club with his name, he would organise international tournaments, etc., etc.

But it was all a dream; none of it came to fruition. Fischer never played another official game.

1992

Fischer’s return to competitive play in 1992 made headlines everywhere, and caused a commotion in the world of chess.

Fischer, who was living modestly in New York, became a millionaire when he played Spassky again in Yugoslavia, twenty years after their encounter in Reykjavik. At that time Yugoslavia was under a UN commercial embargo.

The winner would be the first to win ten games, without draws not counting. The prize fund was 5 million dollars. The match would begin in Sveti Stefan and finish in Belgrade.

After 30 games Fischer won by a score of 10–5; after twenty years away from competitive play, it was not a bad result. Seirawan placed Fischer at “somewhere among the ten best in the world.”

Game 58

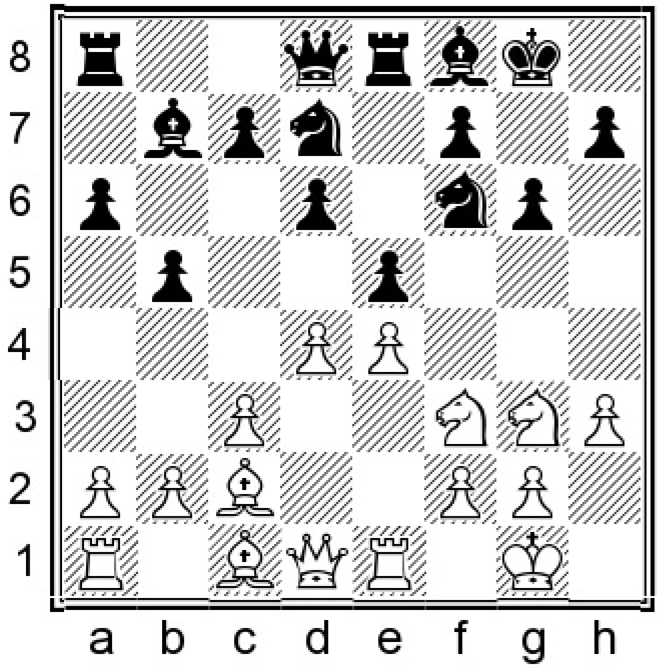
An exciting start

The first game was of excellent quality, one that Fischer was proud of.

As we know, Portisch got in touch with Fischer when he spent some time in Hungary. He tells how, as they talked, Fischer wanted to know his expert opinion on the Breyer Variation, and often referred to it in conversation.

Robert Fischer
Boris Spassky
Ruy Lopez [C95]
Sveti Stefan/Belgrade (m/1), 02.09.1992

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 0-0 9.h3 ♘b8 10.d4 ♘bd7 11.♘bd2 ♗b7 12.♗c2 ♖e8 13.♘f1 ♗f8 14.♘g3 g6



15.♗g5

A move employed by Spassky himself, against Unzicker in Santa Monica 1966; the positional threat of 16.♕d2 practically forces Black's reply.

15...h6 16.♗d2 ♗g7

In later games in the match Spassky played more actively with 16...exd4! 17.cxd4 c5.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17.a4!

Immediately adding to the tension of the struggle; Seirawan notes that this move is a typical theme in the "Spanish Torture"; the black pawn on b5 is frequently a serious weakness.

The possible opening of the a-file another factor that White might be able to exploit.

In the above-mentioned game Spassky - Unzicker White played the quieter 17.♖c1 c5 18.d5 ♘b6 19.♗d3 ♕c7 20.♘h2 ♘a4 21.♖b1 c4 22.♗c2 ♘c5 and Black was fine; this occurred in other games where Spassky defended the black cause.

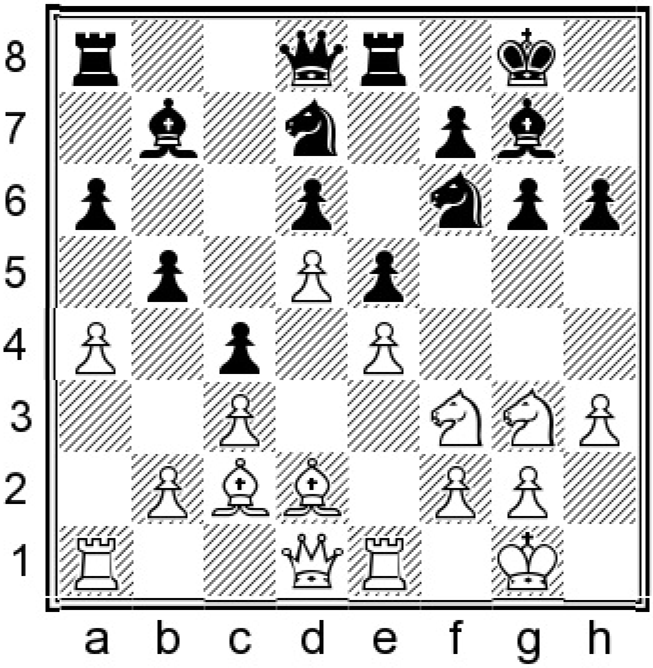
17...c5

This move is the start of a typical manoeuvre in this variation, as we have already seen.

18.d5

White eliminates the central tension in return for gaining space and nullifying the bishop on b7, but for the moment he also loses control of c5.

18...c4



Exercise: Fischer played a new move at this point; what do you think it was?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

19.b4!

Fischer varies from the theory of the time, which was to play 19.♗e3 or 19.♘h2, which weren't considered dangerous for Black.

Fischer's move prevents Black's idea of ...♘c5 and presents Black with a dilemma: whether to take on b3, in order to be able to play ...♘c5, or not to take, leaving the queenside to White, but hoping to counterattack on the kingside.

In the first case it's essential to evaluate the importance of the above-mentioned weakness on b5 being exposed.

19...♘h7?

This move was unanimously criticised. Spassky opts to focus on preparation for counterplay on the kingside. He judged that White wouldn't achieve much on the queenside, since it's not clear how the tension based on opening the a-file at an opportune moment can be exploited, and even less clear how White can take advantage of the weakness of the b5-pawn.

It seems easier for White to exploit this weakness in the event of 19...cxb3 20.♗xb3; in this case there were two important recommendations, although these aren't completely convincing.

If 20...♘c5 then 21.c4!, and now the line 21...♘d3 22.♖f1 bxc4 23.♗xc4 ♘b2 24.♕b3 ♘xc4 25.♕xc4 leaves Black with a "bad" bishop on b7, and the opening of the b- and c- files favours White, as Kasparov pointed out.

It was suggested that it was preferable to play 21...bxa4 22.♗xa4 ♖f8 23.♗e3 ♕c7, followed by the regrouping ...♖fb8, and ...♘fd7 and at an opportune moment ...♗c8, but White still has the advantage in space and mobility and stands slightly better.

In the event of the other recommendation, 20...♕c7, it's possible to reply with 21.c4!, and after 21...bxc4 22.♖c1 once again the white position is more attractive.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue here?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

20.♗e3!

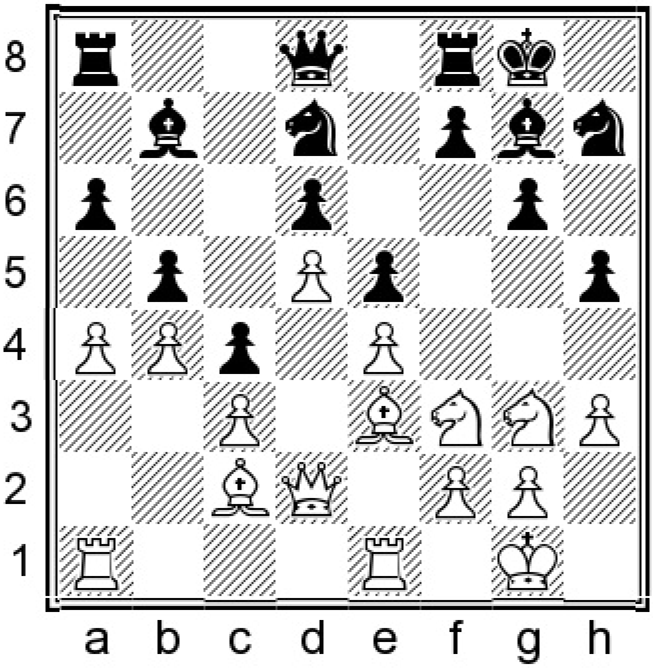
In the introduction we noted that Seirawan includes Fischer among the players whom he categorises as "builders," who construct plans which include both tactics and strategy, this is an example, as we shall see very soon.

20...h5

This move will be necessary anyway against the imminent ♕d2 and does not rule out a future ...h4, to dislodge from g3 the knight which controls f5.

21.♕d2 ♖f8

This was the idea; Black doesn't want to remain passive and prepares to break with f7-f5 "at some point."



Exercise: How did Fischer continue with the plan which he started “building” with 20.♗e3?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22.♖a3!

Preparing to accumulate forces on the a-file.

22...♘df6

Black continues with his plan of preparing the f7-f5 break; it’s slow, but the same can be said of White’s plan.

Question: Why not just “get on with it” by playing 22...h4 23.♘f1 f5?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: The conclusion is that White would be the one to benefit from that activity on the kingside. One possible continuation is 24.♗h6! f4 (24...fxe4 25.♗xe4 is worse for the black king) 25.♗xg7 ♔xg7 26.♖ea1, and only White has prospects; Black is unable to create serious threats on the kingside.

It’s possibly even stronger to play on the kingside with 24.exf5!, accepting that it leaves the important d5-pawn weak, and after 24...gxf5 25.♗h6 f4 (or 25...♕f6 26.♗xg7 ♔xg7 27.♘e3) 26.♗xg7 ♔xg7 and now, as well as 27.♖ea1, White can opt for 27.♘1h2; a sample line, not forced, might be 27...♘b6 28.♘g4 ♗xd5 29.♘fxe5! dxe5 30.♖xe5 ♗b7, and here the most elegant continuation is 31.♖h5!, when the queen is immune from capture due to the mate in two, and White's attack is decisive.

23.♖ea1 ♕d7

Exercise: How did Fischer continue now?

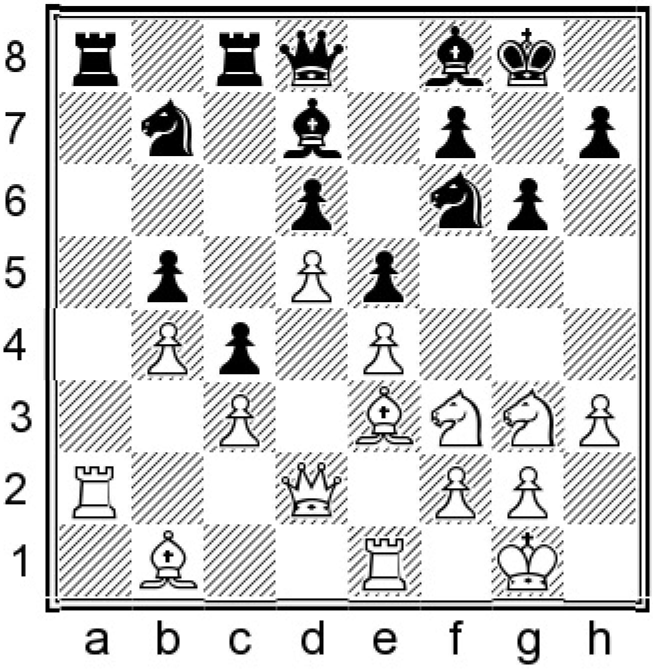
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24.♖1a2!

He continues to concentrate his major pieces on the a-file before opening it.

This game bears a certain similarity with the manoeuvre carried in the well-known game Karpov - Unzicker, Nice 1974:



White to play

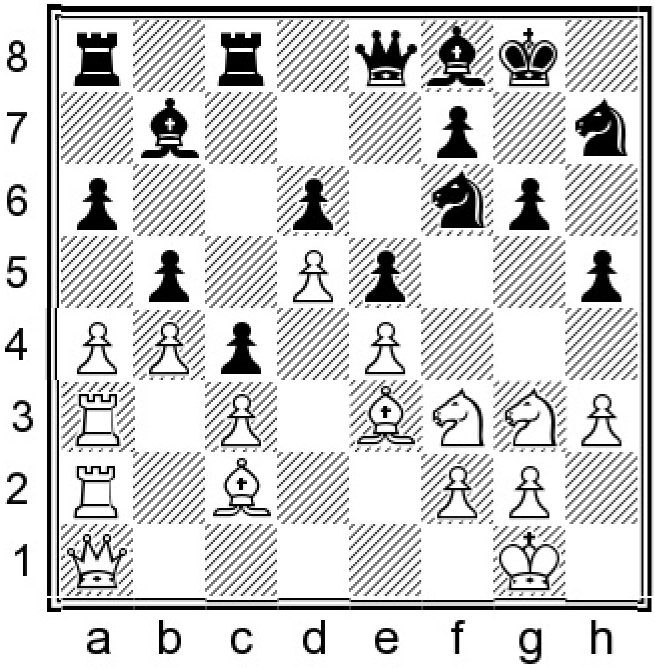
Here Karpov played 24.♗a7!, followed by ♗c2 and ♖ea1 and then manoeuvring on the kingside; in this case White used the open a-file to tie down Black's pieces and manoeuvre without interference; his offensive kept growing and finally he won by attack.

It’s worth reviewing that model game, annotated by Karpov and Kasparov.

24...♖fc8 25.♕c1

Now it’s the queen’s turn.

25...♗f8 26.♕a1 ♕e8



The situation seems to justify Black’s decision not to take on b3 on move 19; Black seems to have parried the threat to open the a-file and his queenside seems completely secure.

But with his following manoeuvre Fischer proved that this was an illusion.

Exercise: What did Fischer play?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

27.♘f1!!

The knight starts on its journey to the queenside. The main idea is to play ♘1d2-b1 and, after opening the a-file and exchanging all the major pieces, highlight the weakness of the b5-pawn with ♘a3, finally capturing it.

An alternative was to play 27.♘d2 with a similar idea.

27...♗e7 28.♘1d2

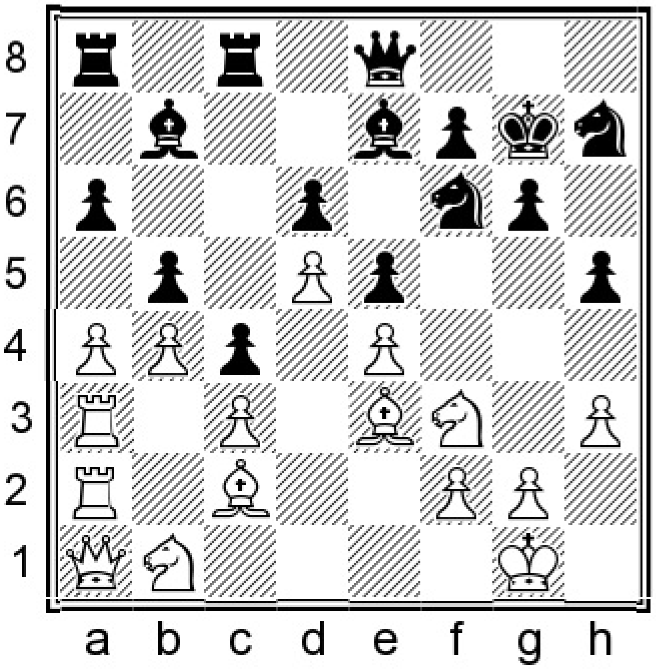
Another possibility was 28.♘3d2, in order to have the move f3 available, overprotecting the e4-pawn.

Question: But that looks unnecessary, doesn’t it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: It’s not clear that this would have been better, but it would have prevented the resource that Black plays in the game.

28...♔g7 29.♘b1!



Black must take measures against the above-mentioned threat of simplification with 30.axb5.

29...♘xe4!

Black responds in an excellent manner; he gains two pawns for the piece and the inactive bishop on b7 finally enters play.

It’s not possible to wait with this idea, for instance after 29...♘d7? White can execute his plan: 30.axb5 axb5 31.♖xa8 ♖xa8 (or 31....♗xa8 32.♘a3) 32.♖xa8 ♕xa8 33.♕xa8 ♗xa8 34.♘a3.

30.♗xe4 f5?!

Question: How is this move dubious? It looks very natural to expand in the centre and on the kingside, doesn’t it?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: Yes, it’s a natural move but quite soon, for tactical reasons, it will be seen that the weakening of the Black’s kingside will be more important, and that it was preferable to play 30...♘f6.

Admittedly it’s possible that White’s chances are objectively better after, for instance, 31.♗c2 ♘xd5 32.♗d2, or 32.♗e4.

31.♘bd2 ♘xe4 32.♘xe4 ♗xd5 33.♘fd2 is also to be considered, and if 33...f5?! then 34.axb5!, e.g. 34...fxe4 35.bxa6, followed by 36.♖a5, preparing b5, and the white pawns are winning; while if 34...axb5 then 35.♖a7! f4 36.♘xd6, and wins.

Nevertheless, in these lines Black has opportunities to complicate the struggle, obtaining practical chances, since mistakes would be more likely.

31.♗c2 ♗xd5

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer proceed?

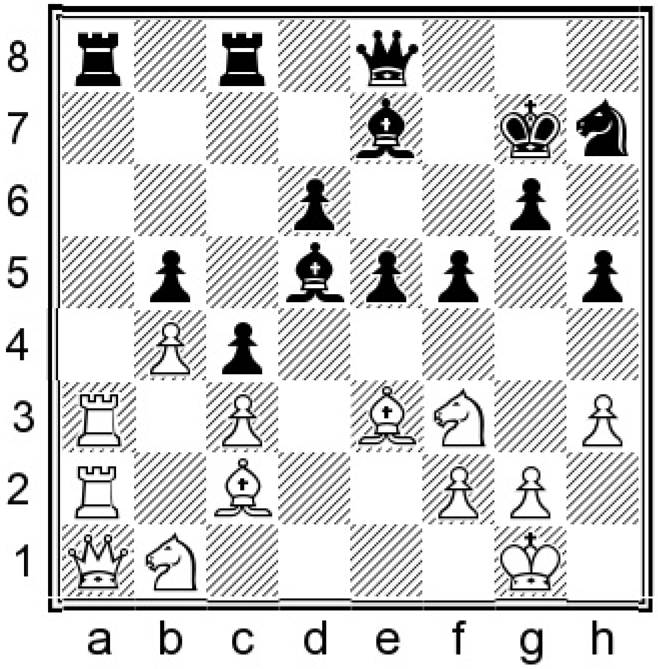
Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

32.axb5!

Of course; to try to exploit the weakness of the black monarch it’s essential to open the game.

32...axb5



Exercise: How did White proceed?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

33.♖a7!

Fischer immediately makes use of the open a-file, worrying the black monarch.

33...♔f6?

The king evades the pin, but his central pawn majority doesn’t provide as safe a haven as it might appear.

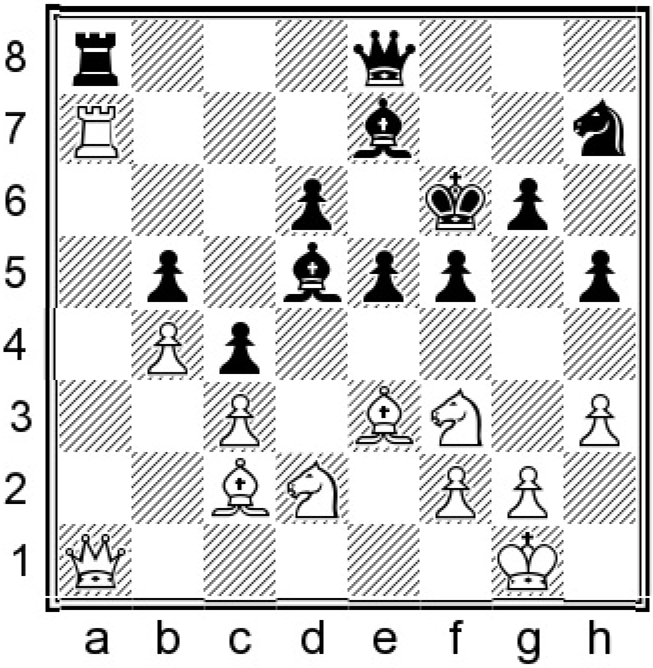
“Bringing quite the wrong piece into play: it is not yet the endgame!”. (Kasparov).

That square was needed for the knight; 33...♖xa7 34.♖xa7 ♖a8 was more appropriate, followed by ...♘f6 as soon as possible, although White would have some advantage.

34.♘bd2 ♖xa7

Of course, 34...f4 fails for several reasons, the simplest being 35.♘e4+ ♔e6 (or 35...♗xe4 36.♗xe4 ♖xa7 37.♗xa7 ♔g7 38.♗b6 ♘f6 39.♗b7!, followed by ♖a7) 36.♗xf4! (opening the e-file and even better than 36.♗b6) 36...exf4 (36...♖xa7 37.♖xa7 exf4 38.♕e1 changes nothing) 37.♕e1.

35.♖xa7 ♖a8



The black position still looks solid enough.

Exercise: How did Fischer prove that “appearances can be deceiving”?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

36.g4!

This is how White is able to demonstrate the drawbacks of 30...f5; White creates new weaknesses around the black king.

Seirawan commented that in the press room most of the masters present were expecting 36.h4, which also favours White, but the move played is better.

36...hxg4 37.hxg4 ♖xa7

Of course 37...fxg4 38.♘h2 is untenable; closing the position with 37...f4 was suggested, when the simple 38.♗b6 is advantageous but even stronger is 38.♘e4+!, and after 38...♗xe4 39.♗xe4 ♖xa7 40.♗xa7 the black position is full of weaknesses and his pawns is blockaded, although Black can pick up a third pawn after 40...♕d7 41.♔f1 ♕xg4, nevertheless White infiltrates decisively after 42.♗b6 ♕d7 43.♕a8.

38.♕xa7 f4

Trying to complicate the game; the endgame after 38...♕a8 39.♕xa8 ♗xa8 40.gxf5 gxf5 41.♘h4!

e4 42.♘f1 ♔e6 43.♘g2 is unpleasant, as Kasparov pointed out.

38...fxg4? is no better, as it weakens the monarch even more and White can play, for instance, 39.♘d4! exd4 40.♕xd4+ ♔f7 (or 40...♔e6 41.♕xg4+ ♔f6 42.♗d4+ and mate in two moves) 41.♕xd5+.

If, instead of taking the knight, Black plays 39...♔f7, White could continue with 40.♗e4 ♘f6 41.♗xd5+ ♘xd5 42.♘e4! (threatening ♘xd6+) 42...♔g8 43.♘e6, with a crushing position.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

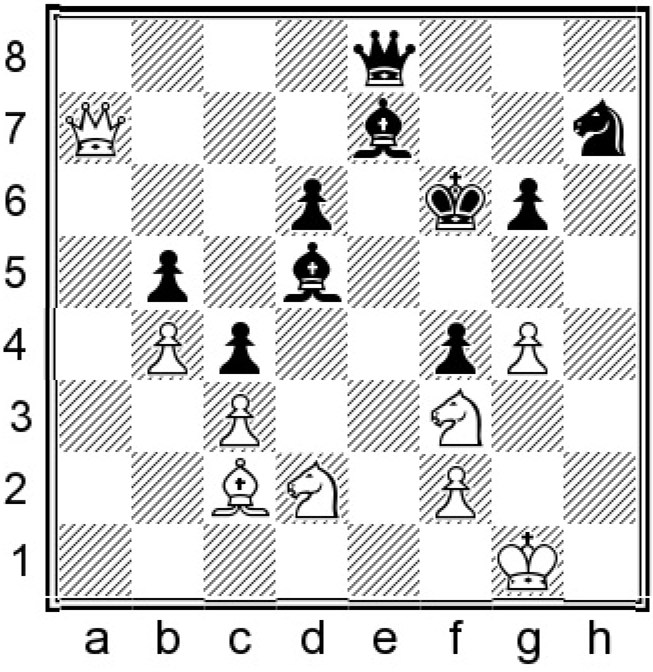
39.♗xf4!

Fischer accepts the challenge and returns the piece to open up the black king's defences; it's not clear whether this is objectively better than 39.♗b6, but in practice it is as strong, or stronger.

39...exf4?!

Justifying Fischer's play; now the attack is unstoppable and easier to conduct.

The alternative was 39...♗xf3, first eliminating one of the knights; nevertheless, White would maintain his superiority with either 40.♘xf3 or 40.♗xe5+ dxe5 41.♘xf3, although Black would have greater practical chances of defending than after the move in the game.



Exercise: How did Fischer respond?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

40.♘h4!

"Now White's queen is supported by two mobile knights and his attacking potential rises sharply." (Kasparov).

Also good was 40.♕d4+ ♔e6 41.♕xf4, or 41.♕g7, but Fischer's move is more "human": he brings more pieces to the attack.

40...♗f7

It was noted that 40...♘f8 41.♕d4+ ♔e6 42.♘xg6 ♘xg6 43.♗f5+ ♔f7 44.♕xd5+ ♔g7 was more tenacious, but it is clear after 45.♘e4 that all the white pieces are better than their counterparts and the black king remains very weak; Kasparov provides the following example: 45...♘h4 46.♕d4+ ♔h6 47.g5+! ♗xg5 48.♕xd6+ ♔g7 49.♕d4+! ♔g8 (if 49...♔h6 then 50.♕d7!) 50.♗g4 ♗d8 51.♔f1 ♔h7 52.♕d5, followed by ♗d7, "winning the b5-pawn and the game."

41.♕d4+ ♔e6

41...♔g5 leads to mate after 42.♕g7! ♔xh4 43.♕h6+ ♔xg4 44.f3+ and mate next.

Exercise: How did Fischer continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

42.♘f5!

With the most elegant move; the knight on f5 is immune from capture and White plans to play 43.♕xf4.

42...♗f8

If 42...♕c6 then 43.♕xf4 is possible, but there are stronger continuations, such as invading with 43.♕a7!, e.g. 43...♗f6 44.♗e4 d5 45.♘f3! dxe4 46.♘3d4+ ♗xd4 47.♕e7+ ♔d5 48.♕d8+ soon followed by mate.

43.♕xf4 ♔d7

After 43...gxf5 44.♗xf5+ ♔e7 45.♗xh7, Black is a pawn down and his king cannot withstand the attack by the three white pieces.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

44.♘d4

Showing another virtue of the move 42.♘f5; the b5-pawn won't escape and the whole black position collapses.

44...♕e1+ 45.♔g2 ♗d5+ 46.♗e4 ♗xe4+ 47.♘xe4

"Now the black queen is cut off from the rest of its army and the game is over." (Kasparov).

47...♗e7 48.♘xb5 ♘f8 49.♘bxd6 ♘e6 50.♕e5

1–0

The chess world showed enthusiasm with regard to the strength of Fischer's play in this game, but this cooled somewhat after he lost the fourth and the fifth games. To the joy and relief of many, Fischer then scored 4½ out of 5 in games 7 to 11 and the match got back on track.

After 24 games Fischer was ahead with 8 wins to 5.

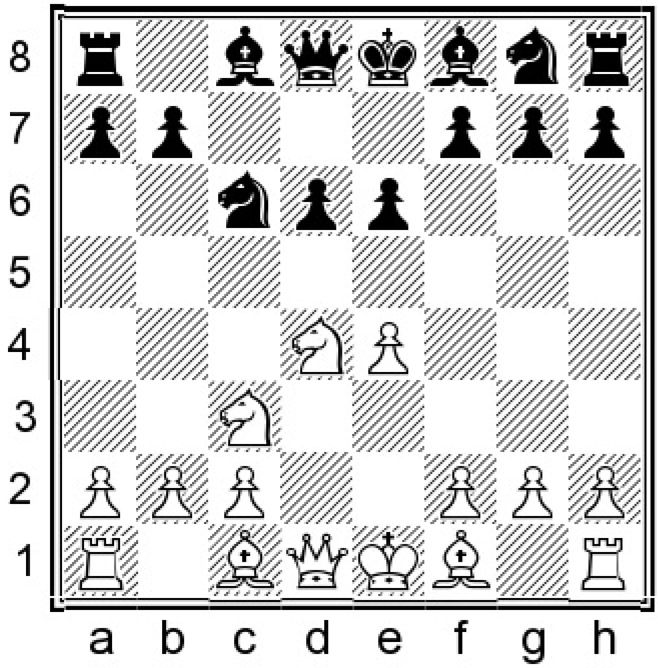
Game 59

A repertoire with innovations

It is true that in the second match Fischer mainly played "his" variations, but the choice made in this game proves that he kept up to date with modern lines, and he adopted some of them, such as the so-called English Attack, which had become popular in the preceding years.

Robert Fischer
Boris Spassky
Sicilian Defence [B80]
Sveti Stefan/Belgrade (m/25), 28.10.1992

1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.♘ge2 d6 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘xd4 e6



Question: This move order for Black is unusual, isn't it?

Show/Hide Solution

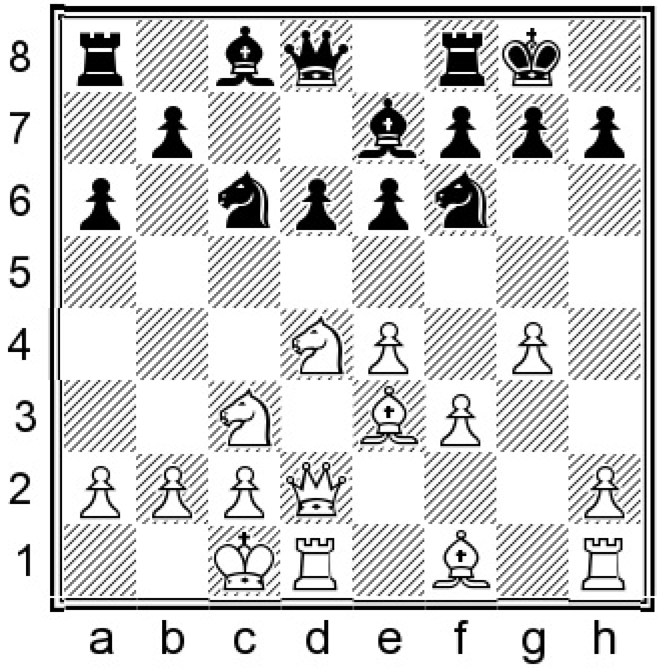
Answer: Black is playing the Scheveningen variation, which is more frequently reached using the order 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 e6. By delaying the development of the g8-knight Black avoids both the Keres Attack 6.g4 and the Richter-Rauzer Attack, which can arise from the move order 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 ♘c6 6.♗g5.

On the other hand it still allows the development of the f1-bishop to c4, which Fischer played all his life.

6.♗e3

"Modernising" his repertoire, by opting for the English Attack; many times throughout his career Fischer played the position resulting from 6.♗c4 ♗e7 7.♗b3, even in the first match with Spassky, but here he plays a line which was becoming fashionable at the time.

6...♘f6 7.♕d2 ♗e7 8.f3 a6 9.0-0-0 0-0 10.g4



10...♘xd4

With this exchange Black speeds up the advance of his queenside pawns; an important alternative is 10...♘d7, which Kasparov employed against Short in Belfort 1988; the idea is continue with ...♘de5 and ...♘a5-c4. But subsequently Kasparov changed his mind and almost always played the same as Spassky here.

Question: Why? Was it just a matter of taste, or fashion?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: No; let’s allow Kasparov to explain: “I should remind you that in those days I believed that the position on the board was simply a Keres Attack with the ‘insipid’ move f3, and that Black could do practically anything he wanted.”

Of course, this is a simplification, albeit based on quite considerable analysis, but... everything changes, and not long after the game with Short, Kasparov chose 10...♖b8 against Khalifman in the 1988 USSR Championship, “And it was only after this that I realised how difficult it is to fight against the English Attack by copying the methods of play against the Keres Attack, and I switched to 10...♘xd4 11.♗xd4 b5.” (Kasparov).

11.♗xd4 b5 12.g5

Fischer sees no reason to postpone this advance by first playing 12.♔b1, which was played several times against Kasparov.

12...♘d7 13.h4

There are many games with this theoretical position in the English Attack, White is slightly ahead in advancing his pawns, although it still isn't easy to open lines effectively against the black king, and the chances seems be equal.

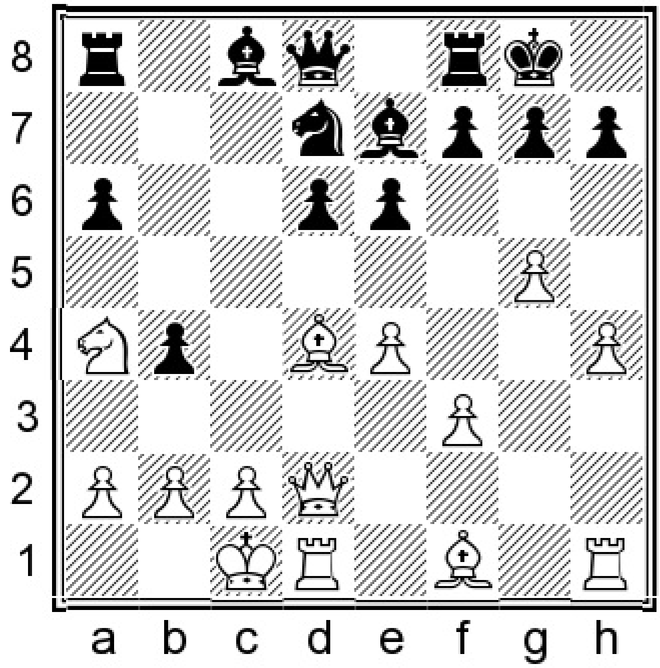
13...b4

There are several possible moves here. The greatest connoisseur of this structure, Kasparov, used to prefer to play 13...♗b7, followed by 13...♖c8, "with ideas of ...♘e5–c4 and ...b5–b4, once again by analogy with the Keres Attack."

Kasparov played this idea several times, with great success.

14.♘a4

The alternative is 14.♘e2 a5.



14...♗b7?

This very move was a novelty and also an error; it was preferable to play 14...♕a5 15.b3 ♘c5, Inkiov - Vera, Varna 1988, a known line at the time and one that was played many times subsequently.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

15.♘b6!

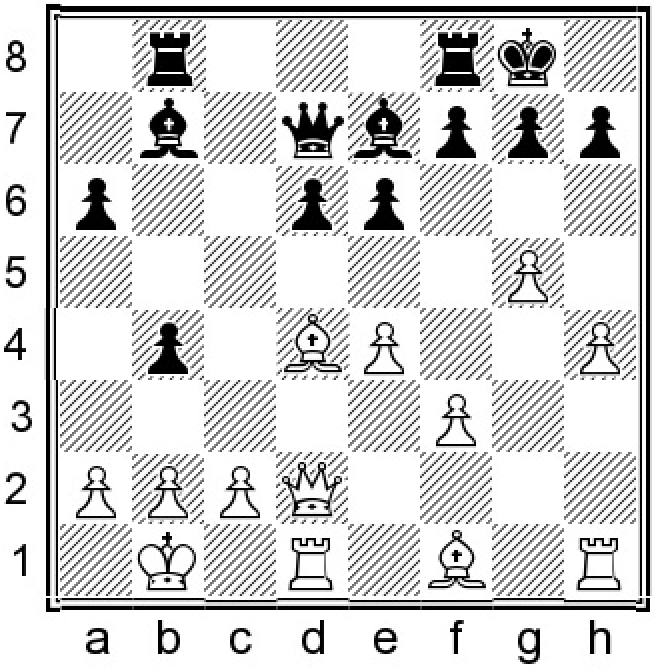
Not 15.♕xb4?! ♗c6!, and the white pieces are awkwardly placed against the threats of 16...d5 or 16... ♖b8.

It's curious that in some later master-level games White played the immediate 15.g6, which is somewhat hasty and not as strong.

15...♖b8

15...♘xb6 16.♕xb4 loses a pawn without sufficient compensation; here Seirawan mentioned the ingenious resource 16...♘d5!? (Emory Tate) 17.♕xb7 ♖b8, where instead of taking on a6, which is dangerous, it's better to play 18.♕c6, settling for one extra pawn.

16.♘xd7 ♕xd7 17.♔b1



Finally, now that he has gained some advantage, Fischer makes a prophylactic move, instead of hurrying to attack with e.g. 17.h5; the king leaves the dangerous c-file and also prevents any future checks along the c1-h6 diagonal.

Question: You say "now that he has gained some advantage," but how true is that? Compared with the previous diagram the only change I see is that a pair of knights have been exchanged, and now Black can play ...a5-a4. So was 14...♗b7? really such a mistake?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: It’s true that there doesn’t appear to have been any momentous changes; the slightly uncomfortable a4-knight has been exchanged for still harmless d7-knight; it doesn’t like much, and yet White has a clear advantage.

The point is that White has a clear plan of attack against the black king, and Black doesn’t, or at least Black’s is far slower, and we know how important it is to “get there first” in an attacking race with kings castled on opposite sides.

17...♕c7

Exercise (simple): How did Fischer proceed now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

18.♗d3

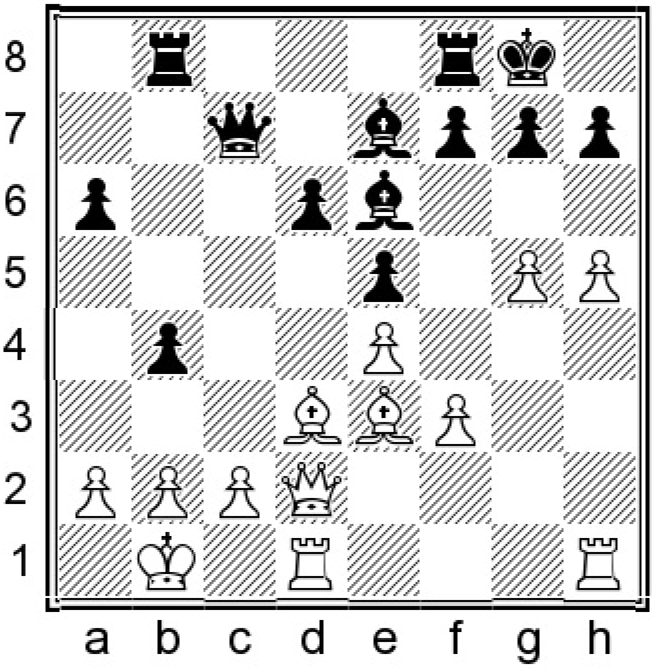
This makes way for the d1-rook to support the advance of the pawns. The superiority in white forces aimed at Black’s kingside will soon enable White to open files, and, as Seirawan described it, “... his attack on the kingside will be like a tornado, compared with the light breezes on the queenside.”

18...♗c8

There was criticism of this manoeuvre, the purpose of which is to play ...e5 and then place the bishop on e6, supporting a slow counterattack.

Instead, the standard manoeuvre of 18...♖fe8, to reply to 19.h5 with 19...♗f8, was suggested, but it’s unconvincing; White can already advantageously execute the thematic advance 20.g6!.

19.h5 e5 20.♗e3 ♗e6



Exercise (simple): How did White continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

21.♖dg1

Of course, White’s moves are natural; he’s now ready to open lines on the kingside, whereas Black has to juggle to try to achieve something on the queenside at the same time as defending on the opposite wing.

21...a5

Exercise (simple): What now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

22.g6!

On many occasions, when the outcome of the attacking race can depend on a single tempo, this move, opening up Black’s king, is made as a sacrifice. In this case, though, White is so far ahead in the race that there is no need for him to sacrifice material in order to achieve the same effect.

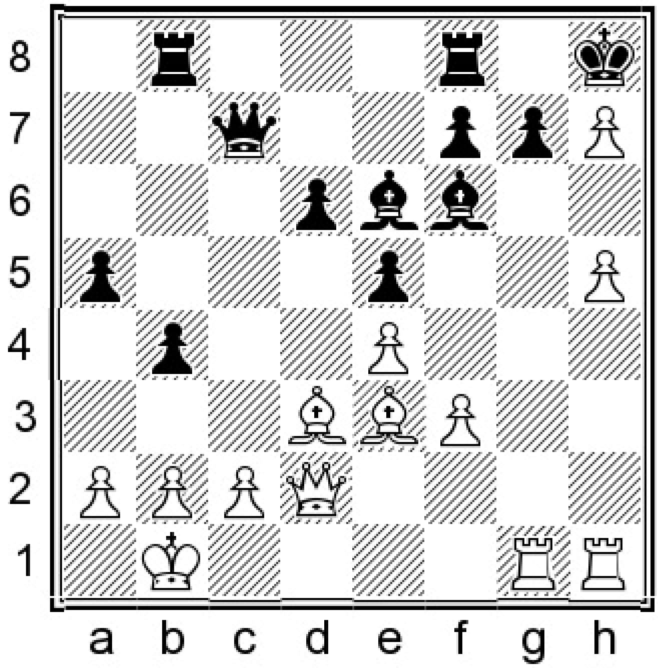
This advance also could have been played on the previous move, but it wasn’t necessary and it wasn’t any stronger.

22...♗f6

Here 22...fxg6 23.hxg6 h6 fails to the sacrifice 24.♗xh6, with an easy victory; opening the h-file is also losing, as can easily be seen.

23.gxh7+ ♔h8

This is a standard defensive manoeuvre; Black tries to turn the h7-pawn into an ally, keeping the lines closed; in the event of 23...♔xh7 White would play 24.f4 or 24.♗g5.



Exercise: How did Fischer continue to make progress?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

24.♗g5!

With the simplest move, eliminating the defender of the weakest point, g7. The engines suggest another way, 24.♗h6!, which is prettier, for instance after 24...a4?! (24...♕e7 is more tenacious) White can play 25.♗xg7+! ♗xg7 26.h6 ♗f6 27.♕g2, threatening 28.♕g7+ followed by mate.

24...♕e7

Exercise: Seirawan commented: “It’s been obvious for some time that White has everything in his favour, but, how to conclude the attack?”.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

25.♖g3

By “inviting everyone to the party” (Seirawan;) after the doubling of rooks on the g-file Black will be powerless to withstand such pressure.

25...♗xg5 26.♖xg5 ♕f6 27.♖hg1

Now all that’s necessary is to play ♕g2.

27...♕xf3

This is equivalent to throwing in the towel, but if 27...♔xh7, to defend with ...♖g8, White can play 28.♕g2 ♖g8 29.♖g6!, and wins.

28.♖xg7 ♕f6?!

28...♕f4 29.♕g2 ♕h6 was more resilient, but nevertheless Black would be paralysed due to the possibility of ♖g8+ and White wins by exchanging the now vital defender of the light squares with 30.b3!, for instance 30...a4 31.♗c4! ♗xc4 32.bxc4 b3 and now, among other things, White has 33.♖xf7!, with the idea of exchanging everything with 34.♖xf8+ and 35.♕g8+, reaching with a winning pawn ending; here we should note the importance of eliminating the defender of the light squares.

Exercise: “So far it’s been simple for Bobby, but how to complete the task? (Seirawan).

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

29.h6!

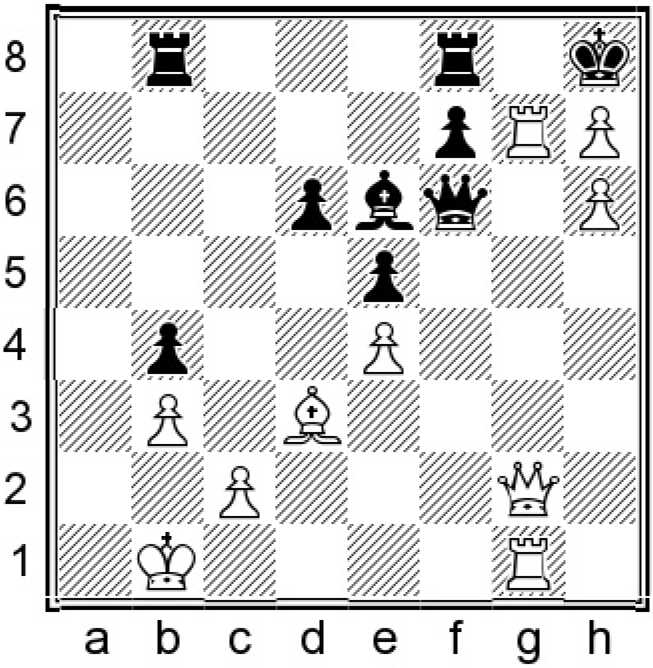
“The real problem is the h-pawns. If White could get rid of them he could deliver mate on the h-file

– that’s the key,” explained Seirawan. This move is the first step.

29...a4 30.b3

Not giving Black the slightest hope; this move rules out ...b3 before striking the decisive blows.

30...axb3 31.axb3 ♖fd8 32.♕g2 ♖f8



Exercise (simple): And now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

33.♖g8+!

Continuing with the plan of opening the h-file.

33...♔xh7 34.♖g7+ ♔h8 35.h7

And this is the final step; now ♖g8+ will open the h-file, and there is no defence.

1–0

After this win the score was 9–5 in Fischer’s favour.

Game 60

Going back to his roots

Fischer needed only one more victory to win the match. He succeeded in doing so with Game 30, where he once again used one of the weapons he had employed since childhood - the King's Indian Defence.

Boris Spassky
Robert Fischer
King's Indian Defence [E83]
Sveti Stefan/Belgrade (m/30), 05.11.1992

1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♗g7

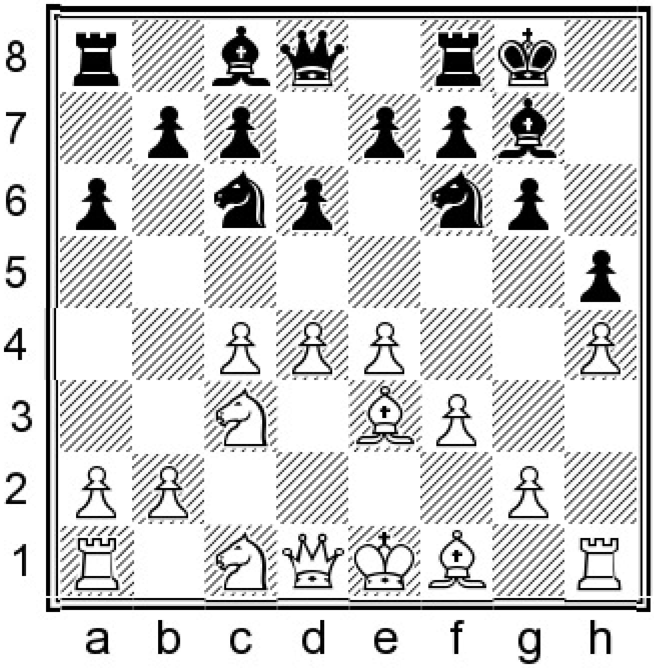
Fischer didn't play his favourite King's Indian Defence even once in the 1972 encounter, rendering useless the analysis that that Russians had prepared, but he returned to it in 1992.

4.e4 d6 5.f3

This was always the Spassky's main weapon against the King's Indian.

5...0-0 6.♗e3 ♘c6 7.♘ge2 a6 8.h4 h5 9.♘c1

This position often used to be reached without the inclusion of the moves 8.h4 h5.



9...♘d7!

Question: Why award an exclamation mark to this move? It doesn't look very special.

Show/Hide Solution

Answer: This was a novelty from Fischer, following two negative experiences in games 12 and 28, in which he played the thematic move 9...e5.

By retreating the knight to d7 Black increases the pressure on d4, to try to profit from White's next move in an untypical way.

But this isn't a trivial decision; as Gligorić pointed out, by removing a defender from the kingside, Black is taking risks; the g4-break is "in the air."

10.♘b3

Exercise: How did Fischer continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

10...a5!

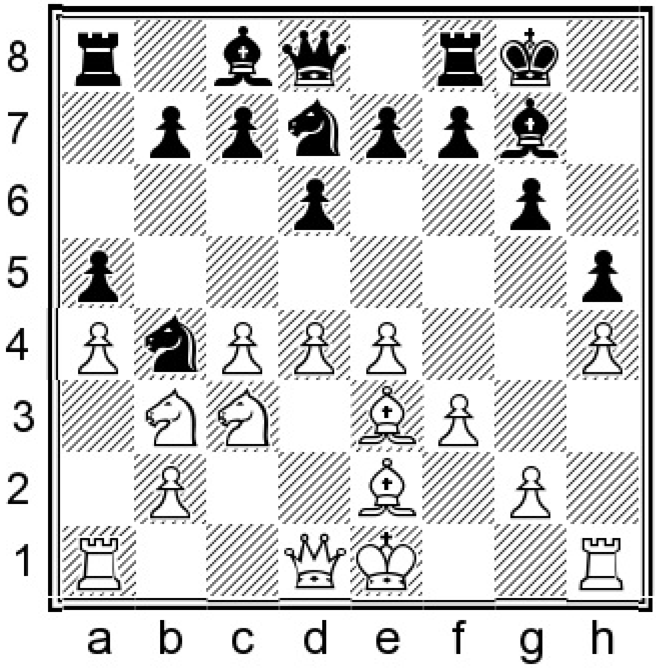
This is the idea behind 9...♘d7; the threat is to drive the knight to c1 because ♘d2 would leave the d4-pawn unprotected.

11.a4?!

This move stabilises the knight, but at considerable cost; it abandons the b4-square, and now the future situation of the white king is unclear.

In the event of 11.d5 Black could continue with 11...♘ce5 12.♘d4 c5 13.♘db5 ♘b6, with the idea of ...f5, with good play.

11...♘b4 12.♗e2



Exercise: What did Fischer play?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

12...b6!

“Consistent with the idea of firmly controlling the dark squares.” (Gligorić). Fischer is planning ...c5.

13.g4?

After the game Fischer commented that this was the decisive error. It was preferable for White not to burn his boats just yet and instead play 13.♕d2, for example.

Exercise: How did Fischer reply?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

13...hxg4

Black consents to the advance h5, but in return he will gain strong squares in the centre and on the queenside.

14.fxg4

14.h5 gxf3 15.♗xf3 e5 is good for Black; White’s attack is not dangerous.

Exercise: How should Black continue?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

14...c5!

With the idea he has prepared, and in accordance with the general rule that “an attack on the wing should be answered with a counterattack in the centre.”

15.h5

Keeping the centre closed with 15.d5 leaves the knight on b3 badly placed and gives Black a good position with 15...♘e5.

15...cxd4 16.♘xd4?!

The alternative 16.♗xd4 was better; the engines don’t see big problems for White, but for a human player the future of the white king is worrying.

After e.g. 16...♘c5 White is able to exchange the g7-bishop, but he is unable to create threats because his pieces are passive.

Exercise (simple): How to continue now?

Show/Hide Solution

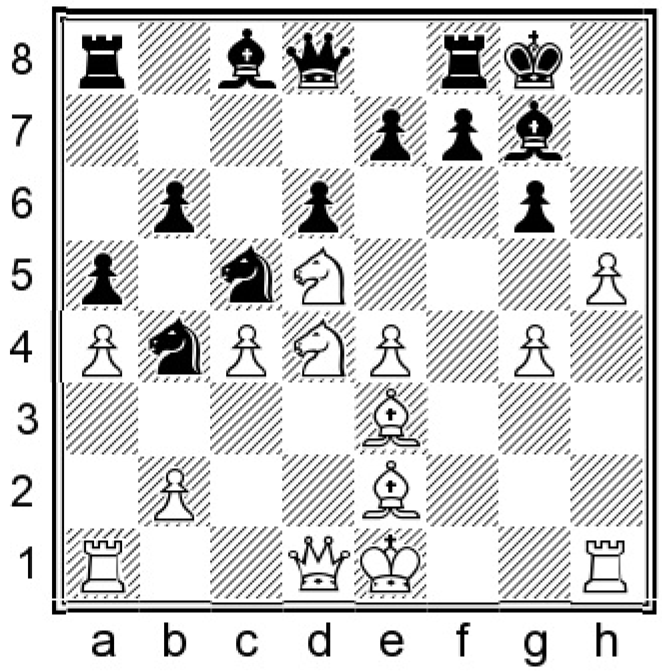
Answer:

16...♘c5

Initiating pressure against pawn de e4; the position represents an absolute triumph of the idea initiated with 9...♘d7.

17.♘d5

The opening of the h-file with 17.hxg6 fxg6 is not to be feared, as the f-file is more useful to Black than the h-file is to White; the alternative 17.h6 ♗e5 18.h7+ ♔h8 followed by ...♗b7, is not acceptable for White either, due to the bad situation of his monarch.



Exercise: How did Fischer proceed now?

Show/Hide Solution

Answer:

17...♗b7!

Crystal-clear play by Fischer, as usual. Black should be in no hurry to play 17...♘xe4? 18.♗f3 ♘xd5 19.cxd5, as then the prospects of the white pieces have noticeably improved and the black king might now be in danger.

18.♘f5?

Spassky decides to complicate the play, recognising that the positional struggle has been lost; this is a bad move, but there was nothing satisfactory.

18.h6 ♗e5 maintains all Black’s threats and the pawn on h6 isn’t dangerous; 18.♘xb4 axb4 19.♗f3 ♕d7 is also unpleasant.

18...gxf5 19.gxf5 ♗xd5

Black eliminates one of White’s few dangerous pieces. It’s true that the g-file is now open, but this alone will not be enough to compensate for the sacrificed piece. White is lost.

20.exd5 ♗xb2

“Played in true Fischer style, capturing even more material and wanting to demonstrate that the black king isn’t in any danger.” (Gligorić).

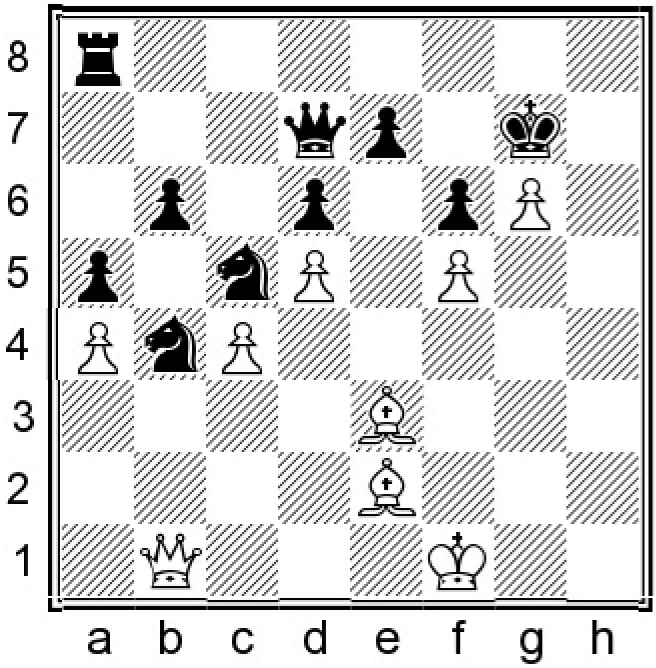
21.♔f1 ♕d7!

Before capturing on a1 Black activates his queen and attacks f5.

22.♕b1 ♗xa1 23.♖g1+ ♔h8 24.♕xa1+ f6 25.♕b1 ♖g8

Further simplifying and extinguishing all hope.

26.♖g6 ♖xg6 27.hxg6 ♔g7



This is the final position of Fischer’s last game.

0–1

And Fischer won the match 17½ – 12½, with 10 wins to Spassky’s 5.

Fischer's generosity

The Argentinean journalist Luis Scalise attended this second match as a correspondent for the Clarín newspaper. From Buenos Aires he took a leather briefcase for Fischer, sent to him by his friend Miguel Quinteros. "I gave it to Janos Kubat, the match director," Scalise told me. The following day Kubat ran into Scalise in the entrance hall of the Hotel Maestral, where the match was being played and said to him "Bobby says thank you for bringing the briefcase and he told me that if there is anything you need, we'll get it for you."

Scalise didn't need anything, except for one essential item: some small batteries, so that he could send his reports to Buenos Aires, and as he commented, "in Yugoslavia it was impossible to get hold of them because of the war. So I took advantage of the offer and asked for batteries... That afternoon I received a bag of twenty batteries."

The friendship between Fischer and Quinteros, which began in 1970, fell apart in the end after Fischer, already in poor mental health, visited Argentina in 1996 to promote Fisher and chess, but during the long years when they remained friends Fischer was very loyal.

Jan Timman has this to say in *Timman's Titans*, "seven years after Fischer's death, Ljubomir Ljubojević told me an interesting story. During the second Fischer - Spassky match in 1992, Quinteros stayed with a woman friend in a luxury hotel in Belgrade; not as Fischer's second, but just as a friend. Quinteros was in the habit of conducting long intercontinental telephone conversations from his hotel room, and he probably also drank many a good wine. After more than two months, the bill amounted to 327,000 dollars." And Fischer paid that bill without batting an eyelid.

Fischer never played again. His last years were spent in Iceland, which granted him Icelandic nationality in 2005, when he was about to be extradited from Japan to the USA. He died there on the 17th of January 2008, at the age of 64.

John Carlin wrote an excellent article about that stage of Fischer's life in Iceland. He described how the psychiatrist Magnus Skulason, who spent many hours with Fischer in his final phase, talking about all kinds of things, said that there was a huge abyss between the mental ability of the chess genius (as the doctor reiterated, Fischer's IQ was superior to Einstein's) and the childlike emotional world in which he was trapped.

"He looked at life the way a little boy does and, like a child he always wanted to have his own way and got angry if you refused him," explained Dr Skulason. He went on to say that Fischer, "for all his tyrannical tendencies, the hermetic genius could sometimes exude great warmth," a description supported by a number of the people Carlin spoke to.

Skulason said that he would like Fischer to be remembered, not for his childish, antisemitic outbursts, "it is just as childish to take that nonsense seriously," but "as a wounded man whose outward behaviour disguised the good he had inside. He was not humanity's enemy. The people he most admired, according to what he told me, were great men such as Nelson Mandela and Martin

Luther King. It is a tragedy that instead of helping him to make the best of himself, the world attacked him.”

As well as the above-mentioned book by Helgi Olafsson, there is another interesting book, *Bobby Fischer The Final Years* by Gardar Sverrison, Ugla Publishing 2019, for those interested in Fischer’s final years in Iceland.

Writing about the idol of my youth (and he continues to be my idol) has been a great pleasure, and I hope that this book will help readers to improve their own game, thanks to Fischer’s legacy.

I want to say farewell to him with a poem by the journalist and photographer from León, Agustín Berrueta, which he wrote when he heard of the demise of the man who was a legend for both of us.

A FAREWELL

(Agustín Berrueta, with the collaboration of W. H. Auden)

Yes, I know we are all going to die and, what is much worse, the longer we endure here, the more loved ones – parents, brothers and sisters, friends, lovers – we shall see depart ahead of us.

«Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone...»

Yes, it is true that he was crazy, and for many years not even a shadow of his former self. Yes, it is true that from 1972 onwards he had disappeared and was never himself again. Not even his fleeting reappearance in 1992 managed to deceive us.

But, for precisely that reason, in our hearts we retain the image of the lanky Bobby in Iceland, together with Pele's yellow zigzag in Mexico, Cassius Clay floating like a butterfly and stinging like a bee, and the Fab Four giving their final concert on a rooftop.

«Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead

Scribbling on the sky the message He is Dead.»

More than a man has died (a man still not appreciated for what he was).

A legend has died, a comic-book hero who never went out of date, because he was neither paper nor celluloid.

A wizard who touched us with his magic wand, and woke us up to a new way of living.

«The stars are not wanted now: put out every one.

...

Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood.»

The last hero of my youth has died.

Not even when Paul McCartney leaves us, mark my words well, will I feel such emptiness.

Now I only have my closest loved ones left – siblings, friends, lovers – ,

and, dear God! I don't want to be the last one left behind.

«For nothing now can ever come to any good.»

Fischer’s most outstanding performances

The first US Chess Federation tournament that Fischer played in was the 1955 US Amateur Championship.

1956

- USA Junior Championship, Philadelphia, 1st.
- US Open, Oklahoma, 4th – 8th.
- Canadian Open, Montreal, 8th – 12th.
- Rosenwald Trophy, New York, 4½/ 11, 8th – 10th. (Here he played “The Game of the Century” against Donald Byrne).

1957

- USA Junior Championship, San Francisco 1st.
- US Open Cleveland, 1st.
- New Jersey State Open, East Orange, 1st.
- 10th US Championship, New York, 1st.

1958

- Interzonal Tournament, Portoroz, Yugoslavia, 5th – 6th.
- 11th US Championship. New York, 1st.

1959

- Mar del Plata, Argentina, 3rd – 4th.
- A. Palma Memorial, Santiago de Chile, Chile, 4th – 7th.
- Zurich, Switzerland, 3rd – 4th.
- Candidates Tournament, Bled, Zagreb & Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 5th – 6th.
- 12th US Championship, New York, 1st.

1960

- Mar del Plata, 1st – 2nd.
- 150th Anniversary Tournament, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 13th – 16th.
- 13th US Championship, New York, 1st.

1961

- “Tournament of the century,” Bled, Yugoslavia, 2nd.

1962

- Interzonal Tournament, Stockholm, Sweden, 1st.

- Candidates Tournament, Curaçao, Dutch West Indies, 4th.
- 15th US Championship, New York, 1st.

1963

- Western Open, Bay City, Michigan, 1st.
- New York State Open, Poughkeepsie, 1st.
- 16th US Championship, New York, 1st.

1965

- Capablanca Memorial, Havana, Cuba, 2nd – 4th.
- 17th US Championship, New York, 1st.

1966

- 2nd Piatigorsky Cup, Santa Monica, 2nd.
- 18th US Championship, New York, 1st.

1967

- Monte Carlo, Monaco, 1st.
- Skopje, Yugoslavia, 1st.
- Interzonal, Sousse, Tunisia, 8½/10 (withdrew).

1968

- Netanya, Israel, 1st.
- Vinkovci, Yugoslavia, 1st.

1970

- Blitz (5-minutes), Herceg Novi, Yugoslavia, 1st.
- Tournament of Peace, Rovinj - Zagreb, Yugoslavia, 1st.
- Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1st.
- Interzonal, Palma de Mallorca, Spain, 1st.

Matches

- **1957** Max Euwe, New York, ½ - 1½ (=1 –1)
- **1957** Rodolfo Tan Cardoso, New York, 6 - 2 (+5 =2 –1)
- **1958** Dragoljub Janosević, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 1 - 1 (=2)
- **1958** Milan Matulović, Belgrad, Yugoslavia, 2½ - 1½ (+2 =1 –1)
- **1961** Samuel Reshevsky. New York & The Angeles, 5½ - 5½ (+2 =7 –2) – unfinished.
- **1970** Tigran Petrosian, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, USSR v. Rest of the World, 3 - 1 (+2 =2)
- **1971** Mark Taimanov, Vancouver, Canada, Candidates Quarterfinal, 6 - 0
- **1971** Bent Larsen, Denver, USA., Candidates Semi-final , 6 - 0
- **1971** Tigran Petrosian, Buenos Aires, Argentina, Candidates Final, 6½ - 2½ (+5 =3 –1)
- **1972** Boris Spassky, Reykjavik, Iceland, World Championship, 12½ - 8½ (+7 =11 –3)
- **1992** Boris Spassky, Sveti Stefan & Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 10 - 5 (+10 =15 –5)

Team Tournaments

- **1960** 14th Olympiad, Leipzig, East Germany, Board 1 (+10 =6 –2) Individual bronze medal. Team silver.
- **1962** 15th Olympiad, Varna, Bulgaria, Board 1 (+8 =6 –3).
- **1966** 17th Olympiad, Havana, Cuba, Board 1 (+14 =2 –1) Individual silver medal. Team silver.
- **1970** 19th Olympiad, Siegen, West Germany, Board 1 (+8 =4 –1) Individual silver medal.

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Game 2 Robert Fischer - Attilio Di Camillo, Washington 1956.

Game 3 Robert Fischer - William Addison, Cleveland 1957.

Game 4 Robert Fischer - Rodolfo Cardoso, Nueva York 1957.

Game 5 Robert Fischer - James Sherwin, Nueva York 1957.

Game 6 Robert Fischer - Bent Larsen, Portoroz 1958.

Game 7 Joao Souza Mendes - Robert Fischer, Mar del Plata 1959.

Game 8 Robert Fischer - Herman Pilnik, Santiago de Chile, 1959.

Game 9 Robert Fischer - Wolfgang Unzicker, Zúrich 1959.

Game 10 Robert Fischer - Paul Keres, Zúrich 1959.

Game 11 Robert Fischer - Svetozar Gligorić, Belgrado 1959.

Game 12 Vasily Smyslov - Robert Fischer, Belgrado 1959.

Game 13 Arnold Denker - Robert Fischer, Nueva York 1959.

Game 14 Robert Fischer - Olicio Gadía, Mar del Plata 1960.

Game 15 Robert Fischer - Carlos Incutto, Mar del Plata 1960.

Game 16 Robert Fischer - Robert Wade, Buenos Aires 1960.

Game 17 René Letelier - Robert Fischer, Leipzig 1960.

Game 18 Robert Fischer - Max Euwe, Leipzig 1960.

Game 19 Arthur Bisguier - Robert Fischer, Nueva York 1961.

Game 20 Mario Bertok - Robert Fischer, Estocolmo 1962.

Game 21 Robert Fischer - Sharav Purevzhav, Varna 1962.

Game 22 Robert Fischer - Karl Robatsch, Varna 1962.

Game 23 Arthur Bisguier - Robert Fischer, Bay City 1963.

Game 24 Robert Byrne - Robert Fischer, Nueva York 1963.

Game 25 Robert Fischer - Paul Benko, Nueva York 1963.

Game 26 Anthony Saidy - Robert Fischer, Nueva York 1964.

Game 27 Karl Robatsch - Robert Fischer, La Habana 1965.

Game 28 Anthony Saidy - Robert Fischer, Nueva York 1965.

Game 29 Jan Hein Donner - Robert Fischer, Santa Monica 1966.

Game 30 Robert Fischer - Joaquim Durão, La Habana 1966.

Game 31 Robert Fischer - Lajos Portisch, La Habana 1966.

Game 32 Arthur Bisguier - Robert Fischer, Nueva York 1966.

Game 33 Robert Fischer - Gyozo Forintos, Monte Carlo 1967.

Game 34 Robert Fischer - Peter Dely, Skopje 1967.

Game 35 Robert Fischer - Jovan Sofrevski, Skopje 1967.

Game 36 Robert Fischer - Lhamsuren Myagmarsuren, Susa 1967.

Game 37 Robert Byrne - Robert Fischer, Susa 1967.

Game 38 Milan Matulović- Robert Fischer, Vinkovci 1968.

Game 39 Emil Nikolić - Robert Fischer, Vinkovci 1968.

Game 40 Robert Fischer - Uzi Geller, Netanya 1968.

Game 41 Anthony Saidy - Robert Fischer, Nueva York 1968.

Game 42 Robert Fischer - Tigran Petrosian, Belgrado 1970.

Game 43 Theodor Ghitescu - Robert Fischer, Zagreb 1970.

Game 44 Robert Fischer - Vladimir Tukmakov, Buenos Aires 1970.

Game 45 Robert Fischer - Oscar Panno, Buenos Aires 1970.

Game 46 Robert Fischer - Wolfgang Unzicker, Siegen 1970.

Game 47 Robert Fischer - Ulf Andersson, Siegen 1970.

Game 48 Vasily Smyslov - Robert Fischer, Palma de Mallorca 1970.

Game 49 Robert Fischer - Jorge Rubinetti, Palma de Mallorca 1970.

Game 50 Robert Fischer - Mark Taimanov, Palma de Mallorca 1970.

Game 51 Robert Fischer - Henrique Mecking, Palma de Mallorca 1970.

Game 52 Mark Taimanov - Robert Fischer, Vancouver, (m/3) 1971.

Game 53 Bent Larsen - Robert Fischer, Denver, (m/4) 1971.

Game 54 Robert Fischer - Tigran Petrosian, Buenos Aires, (m/7) 1971.

Game 55 Boris Spassky - Robert Fischer, Reikiavik, (m/3) 1972.

Game 56 Boris Spassky - Robert Fischer, Reikiavik, (m/5) 1972.

Game 57 Robert Fischer - Boris Spassky, Reikiavik, (m/6) 1972.

Game 58 Robert Fischer - Boris Spassky, Sveti Stefan, (m/1) 1992.

Game 59 Robert Fischer - Boris Spassky, Belgrado, (m/25) 1992.

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The author

Grand Master Zenón Franco Ocampos

Zenon Franco Ocampos was born in Asuncion, Paraguay, May 12, 1956. From there he moved to Buenos Aires until 1990. Since 1990 he has lived in Spain.

Zenon authored 36 chess books which have been published in seven languages.

In addition to his books, he has served as a chess columnist for the Paraguayan newspapers ‘Hoy’ and ‘ABC Color’ for 17 years.

He has written a chess column for magazines from Argentina, Italy, and Spain. Zenon is most respected Grandmaster and FIDE Senior Trainer.

He has participated in 11 chess Olympiads and will be part of the Paraguay team during the Moscow Olympiad 2022.

He received the 2016 Isaac Boleslavsky book of the year award from the FIDE Trainers Commission.

Zenon was Pan-American Champion in 1981 (San Pedro de Jujuy, Argentina).

He has participated in 11 Olympiads, from Haifa, Israel, in 1976, to Batumi, Georgia, in 2018.

Zenon won the individual Gold Medal for the best result on first board at the Olympiads of Lucerne, Switzerland, 1982, and Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, 1990.

He also represented Spain at the 1998 Olympiad in Elista, Russia.

Zenon’s highest ever place in the Elo list was 66th in January 1982.

As a coach, Zenon was director of the Escuela Kasparov Marcote de Galicia from 1995 to 1999. His most successful pupils include Grandmaster Francisco Vallejo Pons and IM David Martinez Martin, Spanish editor of Chess24.com.

In 2016, Zenon was granted an award by the Paraguayan parliament “in recognition for his invaluable and meritorious contribution to Paraguayan sport”: for his chess career and for his help in the development of chess in Paraguay.

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